

# BULGARIA

ILLUSTRATED HISTORY



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Bulgaria





BOJIDAR DIMITROV

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## ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

*Man dies,  
even though he lives nobly,  
and another is born.  
And let the latest born,  
seeing this,*



*remember him  
who made it. The name  
of the ruler is  
Omurtag, the Sublime khan...*

*From a ninth-century inscription  
on the Column of khan Omurtag  
now at Veliko Tarnovo*



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## INTRODUCTION

The historical development of the Bulgarian lands and the people that inhabited them in the antiquity has been determined by one major factor — their crossroads situation between Europe and Asia. The waves of settlers that swept from both continents into the south or into the north at different times, quite often turned the plains of Thrace, Moesia, Macedonia and the Balkan mountains into an arena of fierce clashes. Prior to the settlement of the Bulgarians about fifteen hundred years ago, this most contended land of the European civilization had seen other people's cultures, with markedly impressive presence in the history of humankind on the planet Earth come, evolve and then, tragically go.

The earliest traces of human life on the Bulgarian lands date back to Paleolithic and Mesolithic times. The brilliant drawings in some Bulgarian caves and the flint labour tools are the only remnants of the primitive man, the *homo sapiens* forebearer.

The emergence of *homo sapiens* in the lands of present-day Bulgaria seems to have taken place only about two thousand years after his initial appearance in the lands between Mesopotamia and Palestine. As to their nature and geographic situation, the Bulgarian lands are close to the so-called 'optimal natural environment' which is a prerequisite for man to come out of the caves and for the formation of the first agricultural and cattle-breeding communities that subsisted no longer on hunting and on wild fruit-collecting, but on a premeditated production of food and goods. Groups of people started settling down all over the lands of present-day Bulgaria,

*Prohodna - one of the dozens of Bulgarian caves - the primitive man's abode.*

*Bronze Age cliff carvings at the Magura cave, depicting men, women and animals during observance of rituals of cult.*







mainly in river valleys and in coastal regions. It was there that the people of the Neolithic were able to benefit from the magnificent natural wealth: rivers, rivulets and streams, fertile and easily cultivated lands, rock and clay deposits, vast forests and pastures. The one-thousand-year-long life of those settlements in the same place has brought about enormous piles of debris and other household waste, known as 'settlement mounds'.

The introduction of metals gave further impetus to the development of human civilization in the lands between the Danube and the Aegian Sea in the IV-II millennia BC. As evident from the archaeological excavations, copper production and, subsequently, that of bronze and precious metals were rather impressive for the scale of that remote epoch. These were concentrated in the Bulgarian lands rich in copper-containing ores. The analysis of the metal tools and the unprocessed pieces of metal found in various regions of

*Hollow idol head found at Popovo near Turgovishte; end of V millennium BC.*

*Mid-Neolithic pottery vessel found on a hillock near the village of Karanovo, Sliven region.*

*Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlement mound at the village of Yunatsite, Pazardjik area.*





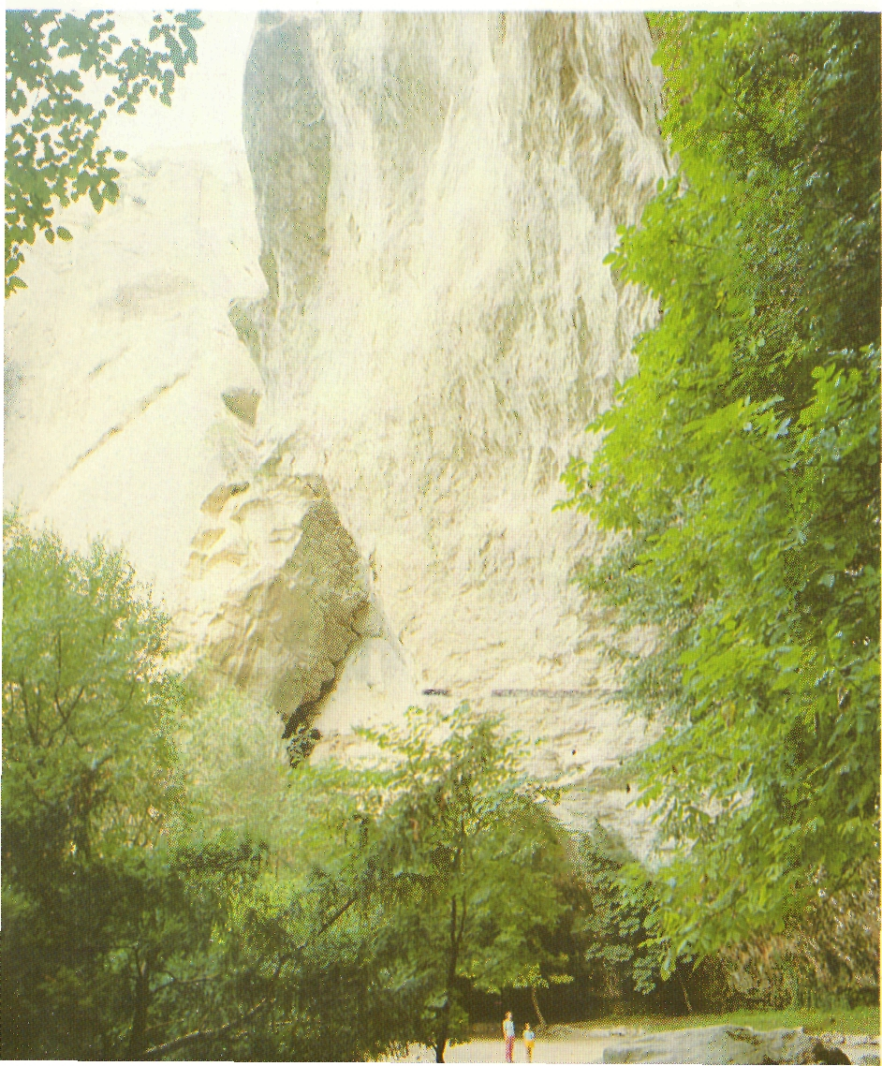


*Clay mask adorned with golden objects; unearthed from grave no.3 in a late Chalcolithic necropolis near Varna; IV millennium BC.*

*Neolithic necropolis at Varna; four millennium BC. The find comprises over three thousand gold items; including insignia — symbols of power, the earliest in the world, uncovered to this day.*

*Impressive cult-symbolizing cliff at Madara, Shumen region.*

*Late Chalcolithic cult scene from the settlement mound at the village Ovcharovo, Turgovishte region.*

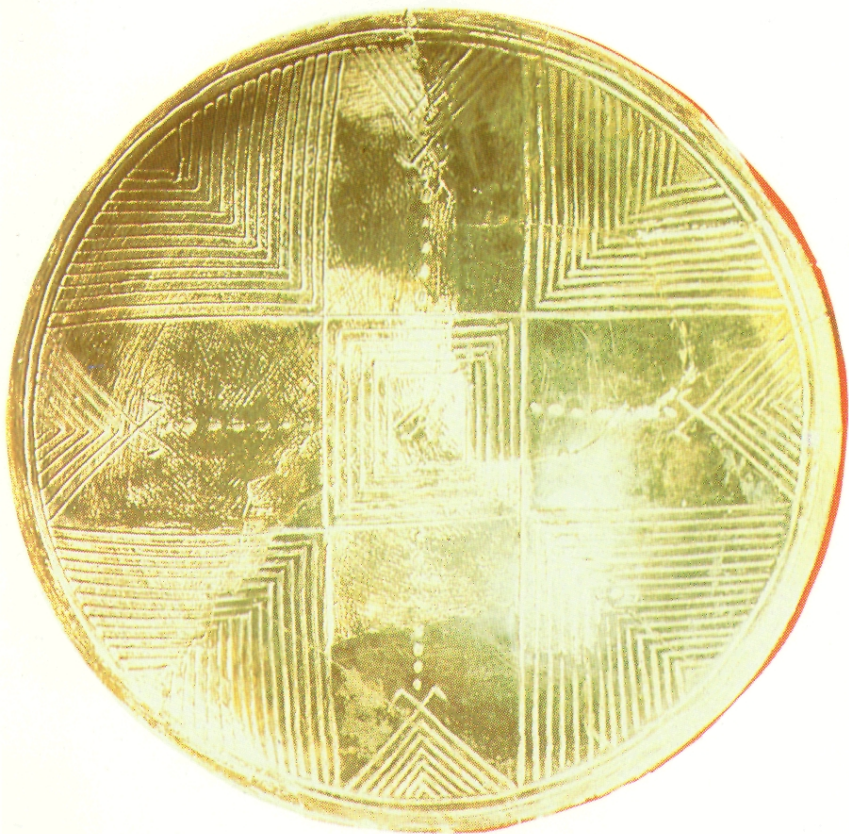


Central, Eastern and Southern Europe has come to show that these were made of metals produced in the Bulgarian lands, i.e. a considerable part of this production was export-oriented.

Improved living conditions caused an abrupt population increase in this part of the European continent. However, the demographic boom was not only a consequence of growing birth-rate, dropping death-rate or longevity, but also a result of mechanic influx of human groups from the south (Asia Minor) and from the north (the middle Danube tableland, the Carpathians, the northern Black Sea littoral). This process had certainly been accompanied by clashes resulting from the endeavour to lay hands on the more fertile regions, on the ore deposits, etc. It is hard to trace the ethnic changes in that epoch of illiteracy for the whole of humanity. One fact is safe to say though: towards the middle of the II millennium BC the features of the Thracian ethnic community have begun







*Early Chalcolithic clay pot with its inside grooved with geometrically designed decorations.*

*Karanovo. Stratigraphic Chart classifying finds characteristic of seven different periods.*

*Settlement mound at Karanovo village. The cultural evolution of the hamlet during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods and the Bronze Age helped to elaborate the Karanovo Chronography.*







shaping up. This was the people predestined to inhabit the Bulgarian lands until the appearance of the Bulgarians and the subsequent formation of the Bulgarian state.



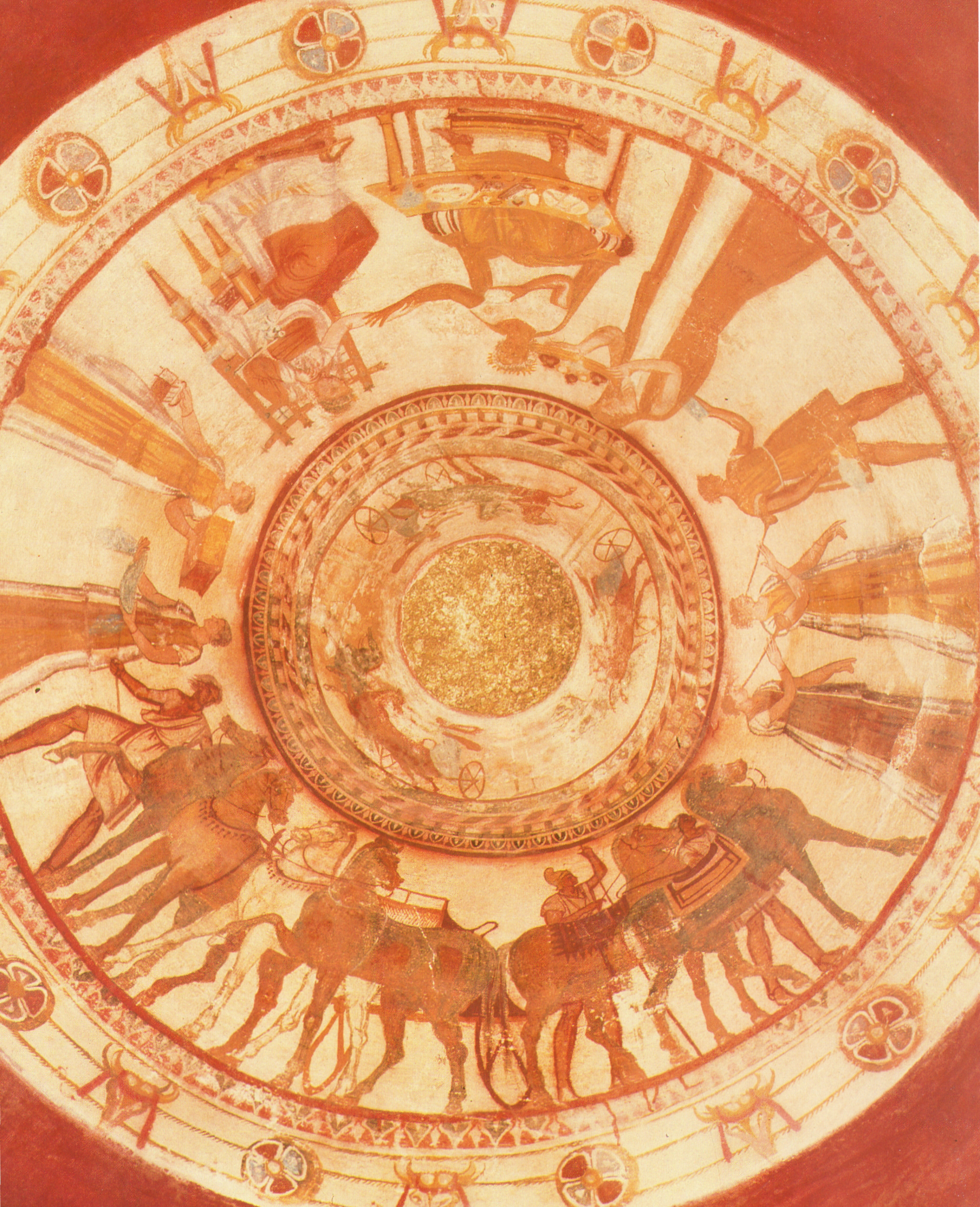
*Nest of golden, copper and clay vessels, dated somewhere between the tenth and the seventh centuries BC.*

*Grave no.43 within the Neolithic necropolis at Varna.*

*Gold-decorated pottery vessel found in grave no.4 within the Neolithic necropolis at Varna.*









## THE THRACIANS

The boundaries of the Thracian ethnos comprise not only the territory of present-day Bulgaria but also the land of present-day Romania, Eastern Serbia, Northern Greece and Northwestern Turkey. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (5th century BC) the Thracians were the most numerous people in Europe and came second in the world after the Indians (obviously the world Herodotus knew).

Regrettably, during their 2000-year-long history the Thracians have not created an alphabet of their own. The reconstruction of the past of this people — builder of one of the pillars of the ancient European civilization, has been based on the scanty information available in the literary tradition of Hellenians and Romans and, naturally, on the results obtained from the particularly large-scale archeological excavations carried out over the past three or four decades.

Without doubt the basis of the Thracian economy during the first centuries of the development of the Thrace people had been the production of foodstuffs, raw materials and other goods which fully satisfied the local needs, leaving considerable quantities for exports in all directions. The Thracian export is particularly easy to trace in the southeastern and southern directions, i.e. the trade routes leading to the peoples inhabiting Asia Minor, the Middle East and the Aegian Sea region. The exchange of merchandise was chiefly carried out by sea through the ports of Thrace, Phoenicia, Egypt, Caria, Crete and Mycenae. This inevitably led to active ex-

*Portion of the painted scenes in the dome of the Thracian tomb at Kazanluk, in the Valley of Roses; fourth century BC.*

*Bronze coin showing the Thracian ruler Sevtum III (323-311 BC).*

*Discuses hewn from the rock-wall of the Thracian rampart at Topolougrad, Yambol region.*





*Thracian burial vault cut in the rock at the village of Tatul, Kurdjali region.*

*Early Iron Age recessed cliffs at Ardino, Kurdjali region.*

*Thracian domed sepulcher at Mezek village, Haskovo region.*

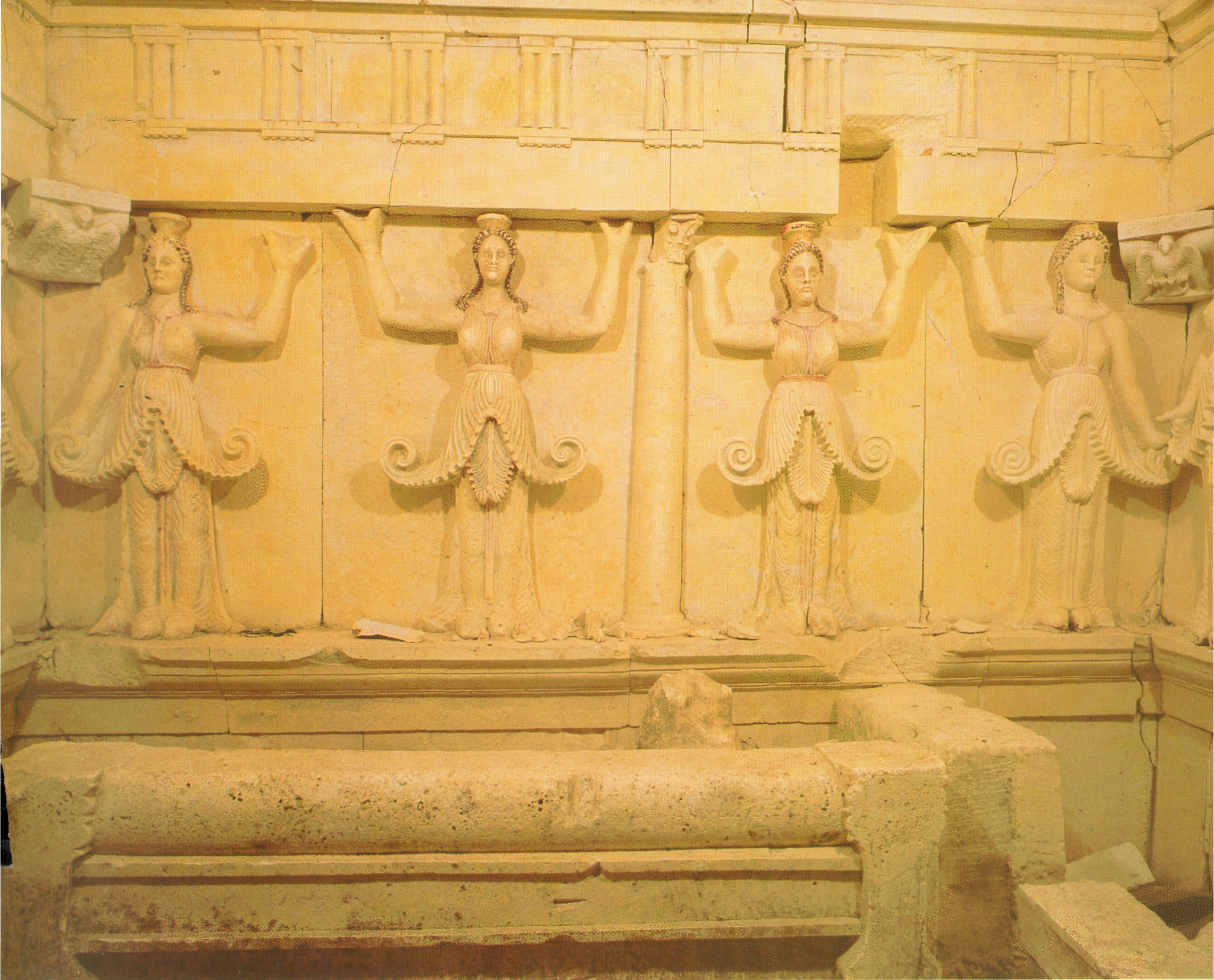


changes of people, of political and cultural ideas and of technological information, too. All this, in turn, precipitated a revolution in the social and political life of Thrace and its people.

It seems that the social differentiation in Thrace has gained momentum and has given rise to the first class and social formations quite early (as far back as the latter half of the II millennium BC). This process comprised all Thracian tribes whose number was some several dozens. Their social structure was simple — the leader or the ruler who was also the supreme priest was at the top of the social pyramid. He exercised his powers aided by a retinue of aristocrats who ranked above the stratum of free community farmers and artisans. Bondage had not been widely practised in the Thrace economy, except for the limited royal domains where it was, but to an insignificant degree. This structure of the Thracian society remained unchanged up to the Roman Conquest of Thrace in the







first century AD, i.e. over a span of more than fifteen hundred years.

In the beginning of the 13th century BC, some Thracian state formations comprising the territorial and ethnic borders of the individual tribes are already mentioned by ancient authors with relation to the Trojan War. They were linked with the lands of Southern Thrace and were allies of the Trojans with whom, as it looks, they had economic, political and, perhaps, ethnic relations. Among the Thracian rulers in this zone, there lived king Rhesus who was famous for his influence, treasures and tragic fate. He was killed by Ulysses in his camp before joining the battles near Troy.

The political detachment of the Thracian tribes was preserved until the beginning of the 5th century BC. Then Theres, the chieftain of one of the tribes, the Wends, made a successful attempt at organising a unified Thracian state. Under his successors Spardokus, Sitalkus and Sevtum (5th century BC), all Thracian tribes in

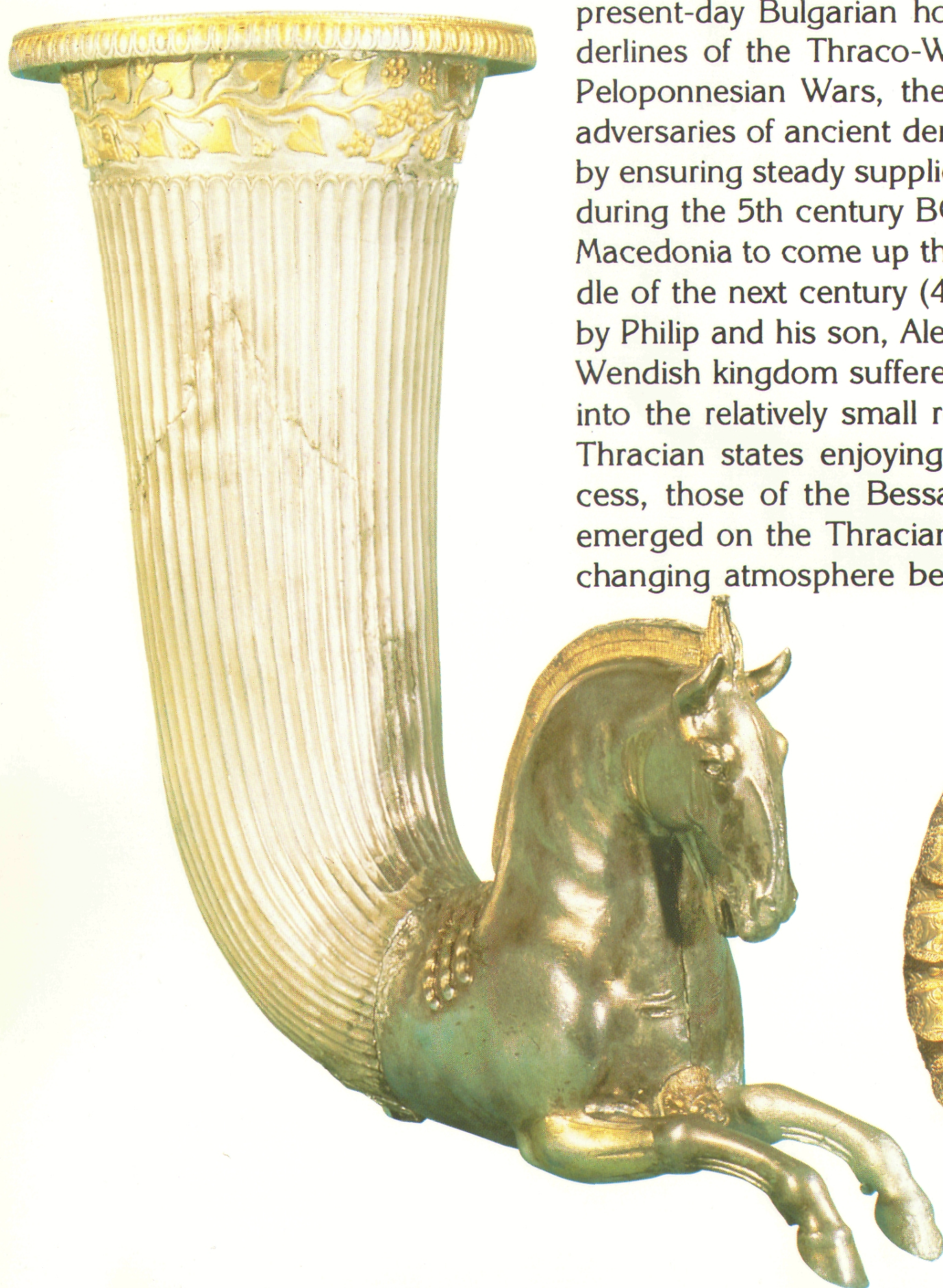
*Thracian tomb at the village of Sveshtari, Razgrad region; UNESCO listed monument.*



*Eighth-century treasure of Vulchitran, comprising thirteen objects weighing a total of 12,425 kg.*

*The Panagyurishte Gold treasure. Phiale adorned with Negro heads.*

*The Borovo treasure. Silver rhyton with horse-shaped base; fourth century BC.*



present-day Bulgarian homeland had been united within the borderlines of the Thraco-Wendish kingdom. Allies of Athens in the Peloponnesian Wars, the Wends' rulers inspired with respect the adversaries of ancient democracy in its northern zones of influence by ensuring steady supplies of grain, raw materials and metals. Also during the 5th century BC, the Wends suppressed the attempts of Macedonia to come up the big political stage. However, in the middle of the next century (4th century BC) the Macedonians, headed by Philip and his son, Alexander the Great, took their revenge. The Wendish kingdom suffered severe blows and its borderlines shrunk into the relatively small region of the Upper Thracian Valley. New Thracian states enjoying brilliant, though transient, political success, those of the Bessae, Astae, Getae and the Dacean tribes, emerged on the Thracian political and battle scene in the quickly changing atmosphere between the end of the 4th and the begin-







ning of the 1st centuries BC. The endless scuffles for political domination between the Thracian family dynasties facilitated the invasion of Rome which, after a series of sanguinary wars and complex diplomatic combinations, succeeded in imposing its power on the Thracian people in the year 46 BC. Spartacus, the Thracian who rose the biggest uprising of slaves in the antique world and thus, nearly brought to the downfall of Rome, was captured in the vicissitudes of this nearly two-century-long resistance and was made a gladiator.

*The Panagyurishte Gold treasure, dating from the third century BC. It consists of nine objects with a total weight of 6,164 kg.*

*Thracian bas-relief on rock from Sozopol, Burgas region.*

*The Borovo treasure. Silver rhyton with a sphinx-shaped base; fourth century BC.*







## ROME

Within the borderlines of the Roman empire most of the Thracian lands were structured in two big provinces — Moesia and Thrace. Apparently, both names have outlived the Thracians and even nowadays two of the three major Bulgarian historic regions (Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia) are still called by these names. The bloody decades of seizure of the Thracian lands were followed by peace and calm, and by years of construction. Soon the Thracians were declared fully-fledged citizens of Rome. Agriculture and cattle-breeding remained as the basis of livelihood in these lands and the manufacturing sector stayed in the hands of free farmers. The enormous latifundia of Italy employing tens of thousands of slaves were a phenomenon unknown in the Thracian lands.

During the first two centuries of their rule in the lands of ancient Thrace, the Romans embarked on the construction of well-designed roads. Some of these routes do indeed coincide with the European highway network of the modern times. Dozens of well-planned and well-built towns with well-developed craft industry (its social basis being again the free artisan association), cultural enterprises and a highly developed urban infrastructure, cropped up one after the other. The Thracians penetrated the state machinery, some of them reaching high administrative and military positions. They even made their way to the emperor's throne. The line of Thracian-Roman emperors began with the name of Maximinus (235-238), a Thracian farmer who climbed up the career ladder from the dagger of a tyro in the Roman legions to the warder of the Divine

*Late antique tomb discovered at Silistra; fourth century AD.*

*Ancient fortress at Kula, Vidin region; third-fifth century AD.*

*Coin showing the Roman emperor Trajan (98-117).*







*Relief on marble from Messembria (present-day Nessebur, Burgas region), depicting a scene of oblation at a sanctuary; first century BC.*

*Ancient fortress-wall from Messembria (present-day Nessebur, Burgas region); fourth-fifth century AD.*

*Floor mosaic from public building at Escus (present-day village of Guigen, Pleven region). Depicted is an act from 'Achaeans', a play about the Trojan War by ancient comic dramatist Menander.*



Augustus very fast.

The almost idyllic picture of life in the Bulgarian lands got seriously overshadowed in the middle of the 3rd century AD. These flourishing parts of the Roman empire were swept by frightfully consistent waves of barbaric invasions, marking the advance of the Great Migration of Peoples. Tens of peoples coming either from the ice-frozen steppes and marshlands of present-day Russia or from the deserts of Asia, broke through the system of Roman borderline fortifications. On the incomplete columns of extant written and epy-graphic records, Bulgarian historians have counted as many as 54 peoples 'assailing' those lands between the 3rd and the 5th centuries AD. Having worn down the resistance of the legions and the city garrisons, the barbarians began plundering the treasures in the provinces, dragging away the population and razing the resplendent Thraco-Roman civilization.

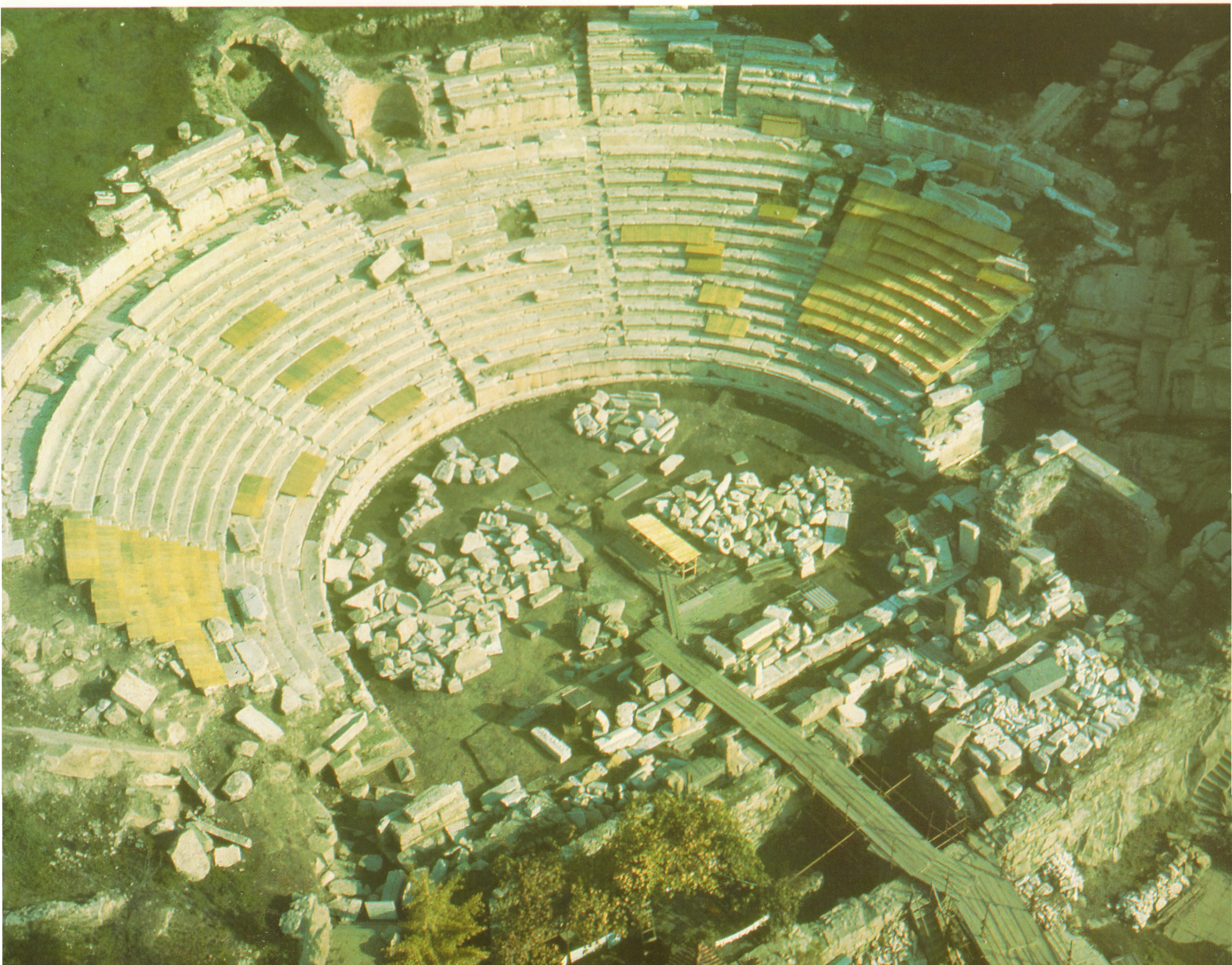




The Roman authorities made serious efforts to stop the destructive pressure exerted by the barbarians. Castles and roads were rebuilt and constructed anew and the barbarian tribes got down to settling as *foederati* in the devastated regions. These efforts doubled after the division of the empire into two parts and upon the establishment of the capital of the Eastern Roman empire in Constantinople. The Bulgarian lands appeared as an immediate hinterland to this city of one million population.

It appears that all this was in vain. The blows of the barbarians followed one after the other. At the beginning of the 7th century AD the ancient culture of Thrace and Moesia was destroyed and life in the still existing settlements rusticated and became barbarian-like. Having suffered considerable demographic losses, the Thracians literally disappeared from the stage of history. Only small groups managed to survive here and there in the high, unscalable

Ancient theatre at Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv); second-third century AD.





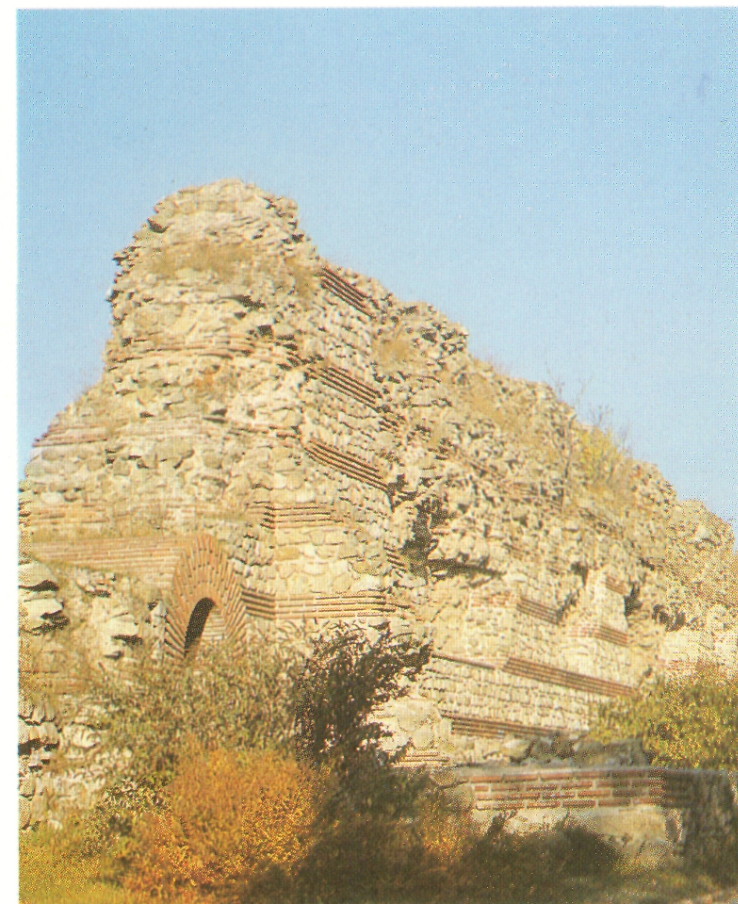






mountains or cared to withdraw to the big, well-fortified city-centres of the empire, beyond present-day Bulgarian lands. *De facto*, the power of Rome there was purely nominal and it was represented only in several of the city centres which stood out as isolated islands in the rough and wild sea warming with barbarians.

It looked as if those lands had not been fated to accommodate peaceful and creative life ever again. However, along the roads of the northern regions of the Balkan Peninsula, there could be heard the still indistinct steps of a people whose right, as assigned by history, was to bring the lands of Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia back to the bosom of the European civilization.



*St George Rotunda in Sofia, dating from the third-fourth century AD. Originally erected in Roman and heathen style, the building was converted to a domed church after the adoption of Christianity.*

*Mural painting from St George Rotunda church at Sofia.*

*Ancient fortress-wall at Hissar, Plovdiv region.*







## THE BULGARIANS

The foundation of the Bulgarian state on the territories inhabited by numerous tribes speaking different languages, is definitely connected with the Bulgarians. It is purely for reasons of convenience and as a mark of distinguishing them from the Bulgarian nation formed during the 9th-10th c. on the Slav language basis, that contemporary historians call them proto-Bulgarians, ante-Bulgarians, Turko-Bulgarians or other similar names. They used to call themselves Bulgarians and so did the Byzantines and all other peoples who had known of them in those days. It is, therefore, more than appropriate that when referring to them, the narrative hereinafter should use only the name Bulgarians. The Franks who had founded the France of the antiquity are, in fact, Germans, and the population there consists mainly of Gallo-Romans whose language is still the language spoken by the French. Nevertheless, French historians have never called them 'proto-French' or the like. The same is true for Russia where the tribe of Norman Russians, having nothing in common with Slavdom, is rarely, if ever, referred to in the Russian history as 'proto-Russians'.

\* \* \*

*Victorious Bulgarian warrior in high-relief on gold ewer; Nagy Sankt Miklos proto-Bulgarian treasure in Romania, ninth century AD.*

*Bronze amulet with a horseman depicted on it, found at the village of Singo Burdo, Vratsa region; eighth or ninth century AD.*



The origin and the homeland of the Bulgarian tribes have been an object of both past and present study and research. They have generated and are still generating many hypotheses and violent disputes. This is most likely to continue for a long time to come. The







*Gold belt tag with an oval semi-transparent stone set in the middle; eighth or ninth century AD.*

scarcity of clear and reliable sources could hardly be expected to be made up for. There is still one fool-proof fact which is that the Bulgarians' land of origin was in the highland regions of Altai in Siberia. Their language is related to the so-called Turko-Altai group. In other words, the Bulgarians belong to the same ethnolinguistic group as the Huns, the Avars, the Pechenegs and the Cumans, i.e., the peoples, parts of which are to flow into the Bulgarian nation between the 7th and 14th centuries.

The Bulgarian tribes seem to have been numerous enough, for large congregations of them started drifting towards Europe between the 2nd and the 6th centuries AD. The surges of migration worth noting are three. The Bulgarians were to suffer serious losses during the so-called barbaric raids against the Roman possessions on the Old Continent and in the inter-tribal feuds. Nevertheless, their demographic resources were sufficient to last them out in founding two powerful states, the one near the Volga and the other near the Danube, as well as to inhabit whole areas in other states, too.

As early as the 2nd century AD some Bulgarian tribes came down to the European continent, settling in the plains between the Caspian and the Black seas. In 354 AD they were noticed there for the first time by an European chronicler. In the so-called Anonymous Roman Chronograph, their border in the south was marked along the Caucasian ridge.

The snow-covered crags of the Caucasus were no deterrent for them. According to the Armenian historian Moses of Khorene, between 351 and 389 AD Bulgarian tribes headed by their chieftain Vund, crossed the Caucasus and migrated to Armenia. Toponymic data testify to the fact that they had remained there for ever and that, centuries later, they had been assimilated by the Armenians.

Swept by the Hunnish wave heading towards Europe at the beginning of the 4th century AD, other numerous Bulgarian tribes broke loose from their settlements in eastern Khazakhstan to migrate to the fertile lands along the lower valleys of the Donets and the Don rivers and the Azov littoral assimilating, in their turn, what was left of the ancient tribe of the Sarmatians. Some of those tribes remained for centuries in their new settlements, whereas others moved on, together with the Huns, towards Central Europe and eventually made their homes in Pannonia and in the plains around the Carpathians.

The Hunnish-Bulgarian association existed throughout the period between 377-453 AD — the time of the Hunnish hegemony in Central Europe. It is true that their name was rarely mentioned by the European authors of those times. The invaders, spreading like a dark cloud over Europe are identified with the collective notion 'Huns', but serious modern researchers are probably right in saying that Attila's combat power came chiefly from the mounted troops

*Bronze rosette with runic signs inscribed on it; ninth century AD.*





of the Bulgarians. It is not fortuitous that when tracing back khan Kubrat's dynasty of statesmen, the ancient Bulgarians always put at the top of his genealogy Avitokhol and Erink, obviously identifying them with the famous Hun leader Attila and his son Ernakh.

Indeed, some West-European authors mention the Bulgarians even during that epoch. These were mainly accounts of battles describing them or their participation. We could only guess as to why did the Pannonian and the Carpathian Bulgarians not come to terms with the Longobards but the frequent wars between them are a fact. It is thanks to them that we know of the battle in which the Bulgarians had cruelly defeated the Longobards, slayed their king Agelmundi and took his daughter captive. Then Lamissio, the new king of the Longobards, hit back and defeated the Bulgarians.

The utter defeat of the Huns in the fields of Chalons-sur-Marne led to the dissolution of the Hun-Bulgarian alliance and to new,

*Proto-Bulgarian Council of Boyls. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*









though individual, activities of the Bulgarians on the international arena. In 480 AD Byzantium signed its first agreement with the Bulgarians, hoping to use them as allies in its onerous war against the Ostrogothic invaders. The respect the Bulgarian troops enjoyed in those days can be felt in the enthusiastic eulogy by the Ostrogothic poet Enodius. It is about an Ostrogothic leader who has only slightly wounded a Bulgarian commander in a battle. This laudation describes the Bulgarians as supermen and as invincible warriors.

In 488 AD the Goths were forced by the Byzantines and the Bulgarians to move away from the Balkan Peninsula for good. The bad days for Byzantium, however, were still to come. During the 8-year-long campaign against the Goths, the Bulgarians being Byzantium allies, had been eligible to walking freely across Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia and they had evidently grown to like these lands.

There started the era of the Bulgarian incursions on the European possessions of the empire.

Only five years after the Goths had been driven out, the Bulgarian troops invaded Thrace, defeated the Byzantine army and killed their leader, Julian. Byzantium could sense the new frightful danger and emperor Anastasius I manifested unprecedented activity in the construction of fortresses. But in 499 AD a new attack of the Bulgarians led up to another humiliating rout — the whole Illyrian army perished in the battle by the river Zurta. In 502 AD the Bulgarians conquered and plundered all of Thrace. From 513 AD onwards the Bulgarian raids against the European possessions of the empire became annual, but from 540 AD a basically new feature became apparent: the Bulgarians were no longer satisfied with only looting and taking away the population from the rural areas, but adopted besiege techniques and started conquering the forts, too. Thus, only during the year quoted, in the region of Illyricum alone,



*Silver-plated chain-armor from NE Bulgaria.*

*Balkan Mountains — central part of the range.*

*Chepina — medieval fortress found near the village of Dorkovo, Pazardjik region.*







*Medieval fortress at the village of Ta-toul, Kurdjali region.*

they managed to seize 32 of these forts and to carry away their population together with abundant loot.

It had become too obvious that if things went on like this Illyricum, Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia would soon be devastated and depopulated lands and, even before the turn of the 6th century AD, they would be inhabited by the Bulgarians instead. Byzantium was fortunate that its diplomacy had managed to instigate internecine wars between the two most powerful Bulgarian tribal branches, the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs. This temporarily stopped the Bulgarian incursions against Byzantium. The last one mentioned by the chroniclers was dated 562 AD. During the next five or six decades, the Slav tribes were to be the lucky ones to inhabit the lands of present-day Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian tribes' involvement in joint operations with other peoples would eventually disperse a great many of those who in-



habited Central Europe. Thus in 568-569 AD, when the Longobardic king Alboin conquered three big areas in northern Italy — Liguria, Lombardy and Etruria, the population that the king sent there did not consist of Longobardic tribes only, but also of Bulgarian allied tribes from Pannonia. The numerous Italian family names such as Bulgari and Bulgarini extant in northern Italy, have remained as a memento of the Bulgarians brought by Alboin and later assimilated into the Italian people.

Other Bulgarian tribes in the Avar khanate also took part in the Avar campaigns against Byzantium. In 631-632 AD they launched fierce battles to take over the supreme power in the khanate, but were defeated and 9000 of them left Pannonia and withdrew to Bavaria under the Frankish king Dagobert. It is not known why Dagobert welcomed them but later gave orders for them to be killed overnight. The surviving 700 families succeeded in escaping in bat-

*Bozhenishki Ourvich — medieval fortress at the village of Bozhenitsa, Sofia region.*











tle, crossing the Alps and arriving in Longobardy, where many of their compatriots had already been living. At long last they were well received and offered their first accommodation in the region of Venice but after the year 668 AD they had to move to the deserted coast of Ravenna, an exarchate in present-day Italian region of Campobasso. Two hundred years later an ancient writer, Paulus Diaconus, visited them and heard them speak Latin and Bulgarian. Naturally, as the years went by they had also been assimilated into the Italian people. Even today some regions in Rimini and Osimo are called 'the Bulgarian parts', 'the Bulgarian land', 'the land of the Bulgarian Baron'...

The Bulgarians living in the plains between the Caucasus, the Black and the Caspian seas preserved intact and even increased their human, economic and military potential. Despite the vicissitudes of fate, they were predestined to found the Bulgarian state.

*Voukelon — medieval fortress at the village of Matochina, Haskovo region.*

*Bialgrad — medieval fortress at the village of Gougoutka, Haskovo region.*







## LIFE, ECONOMY, CULTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BULGARIANS UNTIL THE FOUNDATION OF THE BULGARIAN STATE

It goes without saying that when the object of study is a period of nearly 700 years, all events can be presented only in progress. The development the Bulgarians had undergone over the 700-year span is truly unbelievable. They had quickly overtaken peoples with whom they had the same start in the Altai steppes, including their 'cousins' the Avars, the Pechenegs, the Uzes and the Cumans.

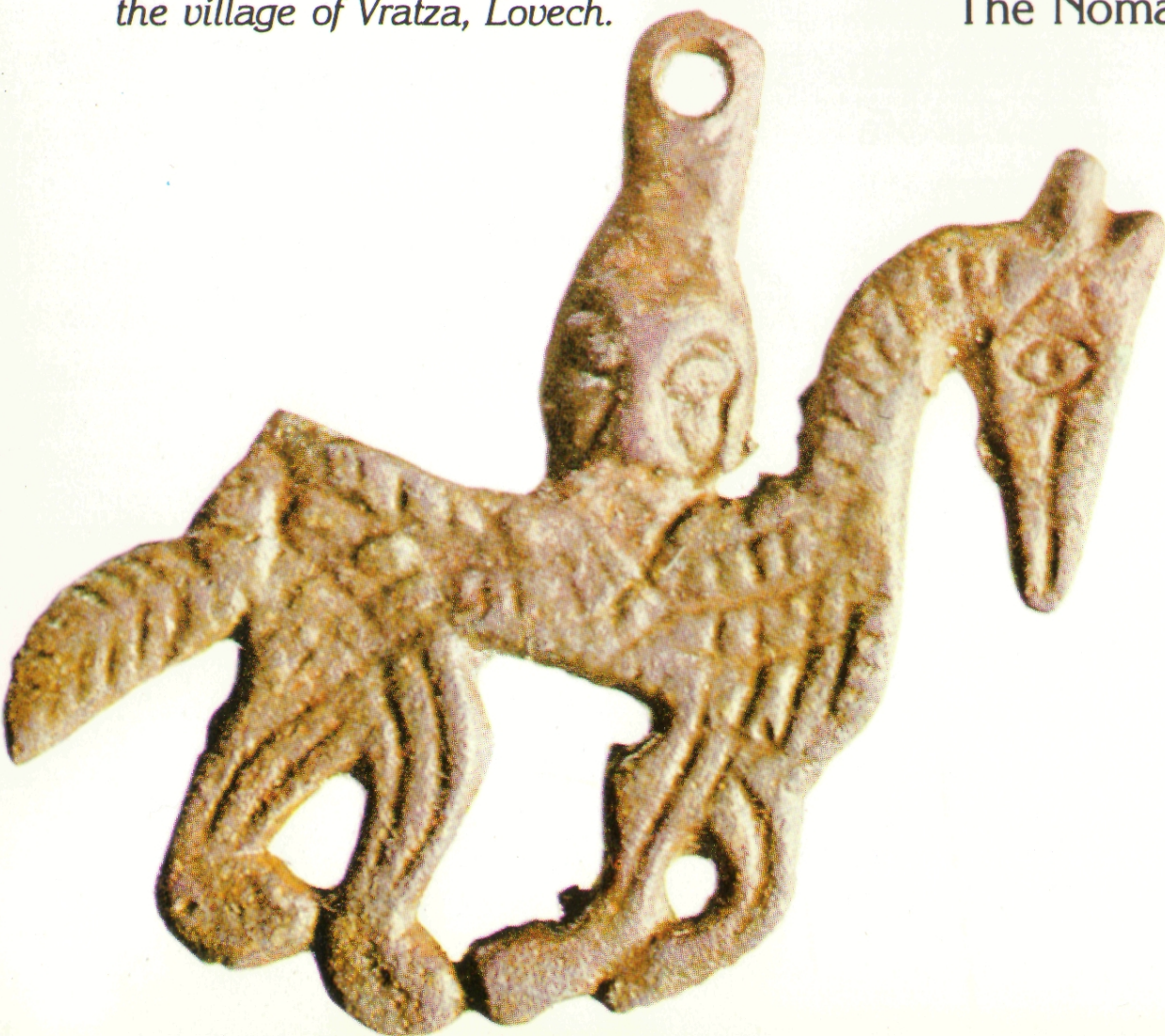
Undoubtedly, the Bulgarians used to be Nomads in their homeland. This does not mean, as many wrongly believe, that they lived on horseback and in carts or were travelling somewhere all the time. In the academic language 'Nomaddom' is a term which means a manner of production applied by peoples whose basic occupation is cattle-breeding. The Nomads, like other types of race, had permanent settlements where they used to spend winter only. During the remaining three seasons the men and the grown-up children used to move all the time with their herds along the territory of the tribe in search of pastures. Those engaged in cattle-breeding in the Bulgarian lands kept doing it up till the Balkan Wars. The women in the towns of Kotel and Zheravna, as is well-known, saw their husbands and their grown-up boys only from Christmas onwards, at most until the end of February. The rest of the time they spent with their flocks in Dobrudja. Similar was the situation in the towns of Smolyan, Shiroka Luka and Dospat. The only difference was that the men there used to take their sheep to Aegian Thrace.

The Nomad way of life was adopted by one hundred percent

*Thick greenwood round Sozopol, Burgas region.*

*Lime-stone model of proto-Bulgarian yurt with graffito on it from Devnya, Varna region; eighth-ninth century AD.*

*Bronze amulet showing a foal with a human head set on its back, found at the village of Vratza, Lovech.*





of the population in the Altai, whereas in the new settlements — the north Black Sea plains and the Crimea, this percentage was considerably lower. The Bulgarians who had established themselves there for a period of 300 years, built big stone towns and forts, and developed substantial ore production and metallurgy. They needed significant, for the time, quantities of metal for arms and for agricultural tools. Yes, indeed, for agricultural tools, because archeological excavations have proved beyond doubt, that not a few of the Bulgarian population had begun cultivating the land, sowing and reaping. Moreover, some seeds discovered during excavations have centuries long selection aimed at obtaining high-yielding varieties.

The achievements of the Bulgarians during that time astonished even their contemporaries. In amazement, Armenian historians wrote that to the north of the Caucasus only the Bulgarians had stone towns while all other peoples were living in huts, dug-outs and tents. Metal production enabled them to arm and cover with shields not only the warriors but also their horses. Some skills and achievements of the Bulgarian physicians, e.g. complicated skull operations, or of the mathematicians, e.g. the surprisingly exact calendar, are highly admired by the respective experts even today.

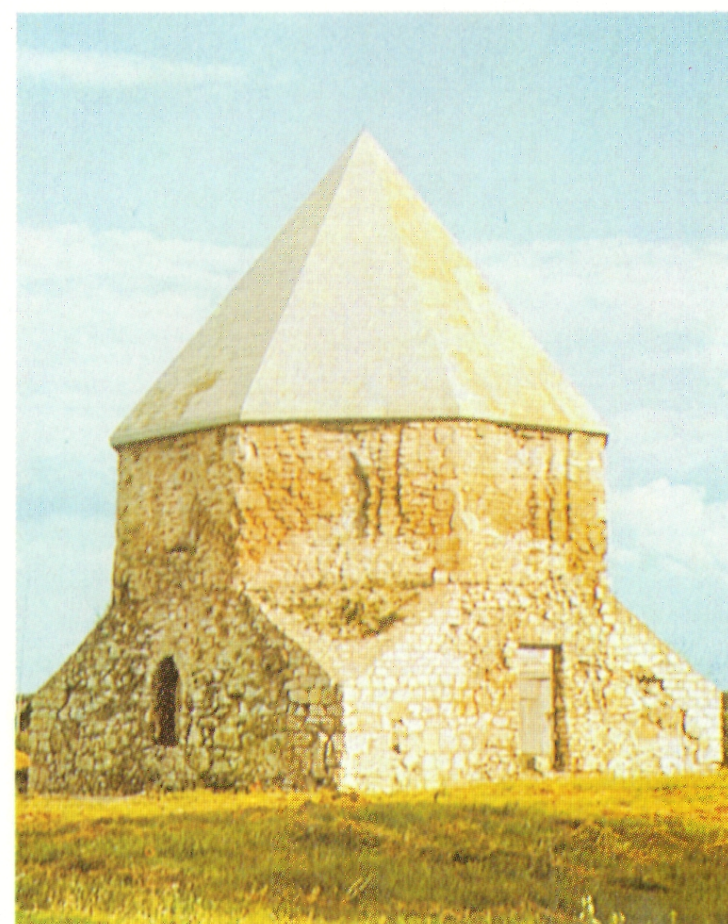
Indeed, the economic and technological advancement of the Bulgarians in comparison with other barbarian peoples, was neither due to their racial superiority nor to them being chosen by God. Both in the past and at present, there have been peoples who choose to shut themselves out, rejecting anything foreign, while other peoples are eager to adopt and develop further any borrowed ideas, cultures and technologies. Obviously, the Bulgarians were a people of the second type. Besides everything else, they had been lucky living where the borders of the world's greatest civilizations — China, India, Persia and Byzantium lay. It was from them that they learned to the full about everything useful in any sphere of life.

It is difficult to say anything about their type of race from the 4th century AD onwards. Present-day Bulgarians' general idea about their ancestors as short, crooked-legged mongoloids was never confirmed either by ancient written sources or by archeological excavations. Even the Byzantines who did not like them, had not written about such type of race among the olden Bulgarians. Ancient foreign writers used to describe the Bulgarians as tall and slender people with extraordinary bodily strength and stamina. An ancient Arab geographer even complained that ten Arabs could not fight one Bulgarian. Archeological excavations of Bulgarian necropolises in Pliska, Kiulevcha, Novi Pazar and in other sites, dating from the 7th through the 9th centuries AD have shown that the average height of the Bulgarians buried there was 1.75 m (five feet ten), whereas



*Amulet with an animal depicted on it; ninth-tenth century AD.*

*Turret of a castle near the village of Bolgari, Russia.*





Gold jug, 36 cm high, an item of the treasure of khan Kubrat; Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.



the average height of the Europeans at that time was 1.60 m (five feet four).

Neither the height nor the physical strength of the Bulgarians spoke of anything unusual. It has long been proven that the height is in direct proportion to meat consumption and physical exercise. The large highly productive herds provided an abundance of meat for the Bulgarian menu while the military service and the hard labour in the fields gave them the physical exercise.

The Turks, as is known, are not mongoloids either. It is quite doubtful though, that even the Turkic race type had survived in the three centuries of settled life between the Caucasus, the Black and the Caspian seas. The infinitely open and flexible system of the society discussed hereinafter attracted a lot of people from other nations, who had been driven out or had run away themselves for various reasons. In the Black Sea littoral the Bulgarians assimilated thousands of Sarmatians and Scythians. On each of their numerous campaigns in Central Europe and to the south of the Danube, they kidnapped tens of thousands of men, women and children — Germanics, Slavs, Thracians, Romans and Greeks who were all gradually integrated into the Bulgarian society without a vestige of discrimination. Thus, talking about a distinct Bulgarian type of race at the time of khan Kubrat, the founder of the Bulgarian state, would simply be impossible. According to some linguists the name 'Bulgars' itself means 'mixture', i.e. a mixture, or a blend of people from different peoples.

The religion of the Bulgarians back in their homeland was animistic. The cult of the ancestors, quackery, shamanism and the faith in the supreme God Tangra merged all into one. However, in the community itself, there ruled a remarkable religious tolerance.

Both the archeological excavations and the documentary evidence testify that among the Bulgarians at the time of their settle-





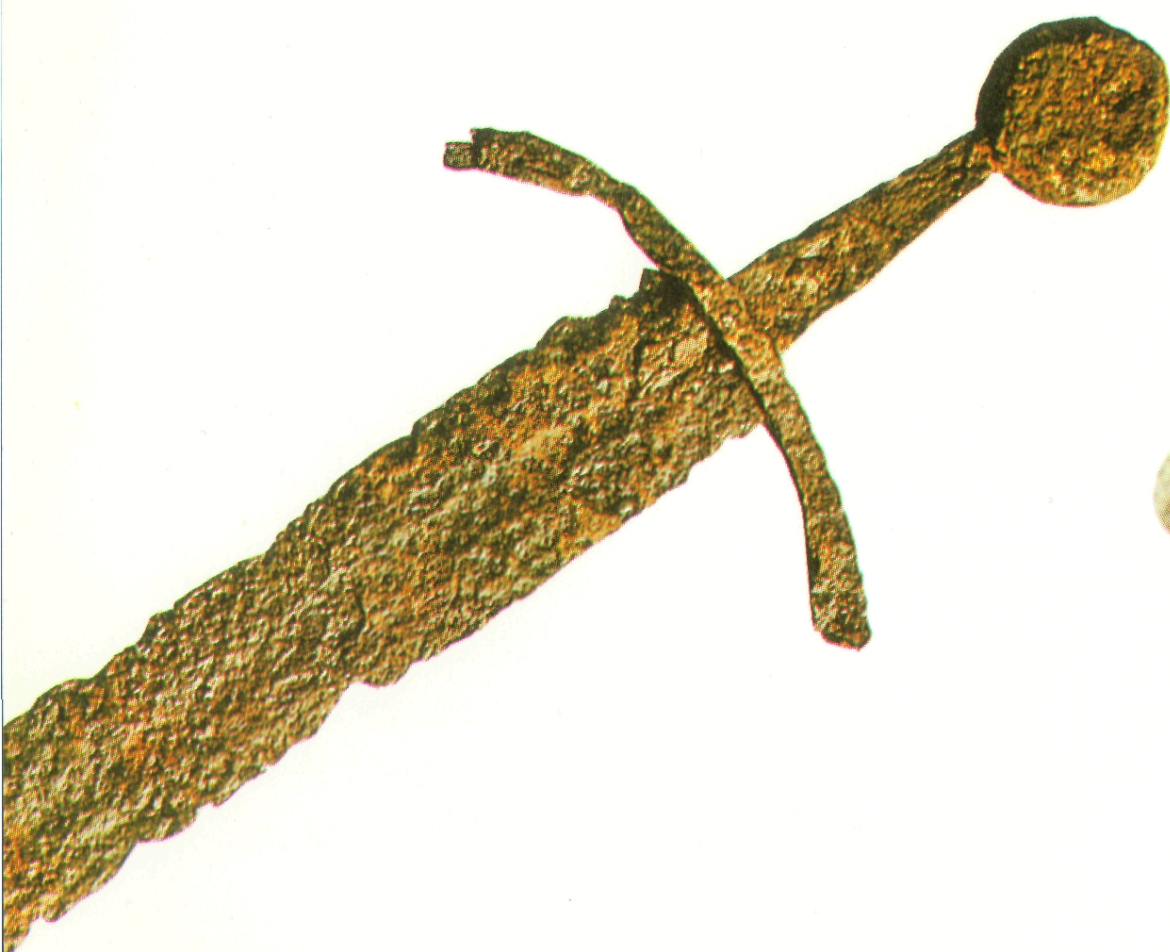
*Gold hemispherical clasp of horse-collar, an item of the treasure of khan Kubrat from the village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.*

ment in the Black Sea littoral there had been Christians and Buddhists, as well as Jews. To all appearances khan Kubrat himself was a Christian, and so were other khans of the pagan period of the Bulgarian state.

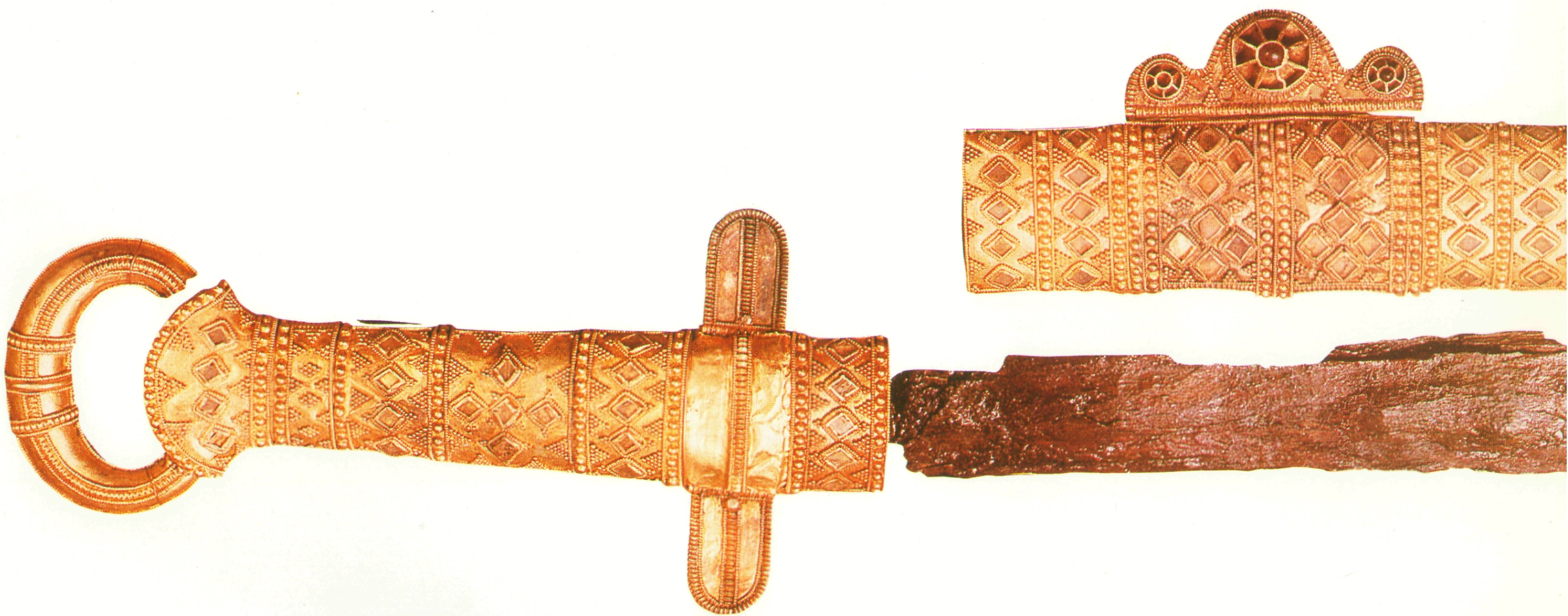
Special attention should be paid to the military organization of the Bulgarians. The army consisted of all physically strong and battle-fit men but, in critical times, young women were also known to have been recruited. It may be from those days that we have inherited the currently popular view that he who has not done his military service is no real man. Stringent customary rules turned later into a law, stipulated the rights and obligations of the military men and, in many respects, that law is very close to contemporary army statutes. The troops were mainly horse-mounted. Besides the light cavalry which was customary with the peoples in the steppes, the Bulgarians had contingents of heavily-armed soldiers with both

*Bronze amulet with a horseman depicted on it.*

*Broad sword; seventh century AD.*







men and horses covered in chainarmour made of iron or felt. A blow delivered by the heavily armed cavalry (in khan Krum times at the beginning of the 9th century it was about 30 000-strong) could be compared with the effect of the blow a contemporary tank army would have on lightly-armed infantry divisions. In fact, the repeated Bulgarian victories over Byzantium were mainly due to the blows struck by the heavy cavalry. The Byzantine army had never had more than 400 heavily-armed warriors on horseback.

The armaments of the Bulgarians consisted of swords, battle-axes, knives and javelins for the heavy cavalry, and lances for the light cavalry, as well as of heavy bows and arrows.

Relying solely on their troops the Bulgarians managed to survive in the turmoils of the Great Migration of the peoples and then lived to see their sidereal day.

*Sword and scabbard made of steel, gold and glass, items of the treasure of khan Kubrat from the village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.*







## KHAN KUBRAT AND THE BIRTH OF BULGARIA

The contemporary Bulgarian is obsessed by the notion that in the middle of the 6th century AD the Bulgarians living between the Caucasus, the Black and Caspian seas were conquered and then fell under the yoke of the Turkic khanate. This is not very precise and it is not true either, at least in terms of the modern definitions of the words 'conquered' and 'yoke'. The relationship between the ancient peoples and their rulers often had dimensions which could not be fitted into the parameters of present-day notions and interpretations.

The truth is that in 567-568 AD khagan Sildjibu, a supreme ruler of the so-called Turkic khanate (state type formation, established in the Altai region by means of uniting many Turkic tribes none of which could dominate over the others) forced the Bulgarians, the Khazars and the Belenzers to join his Turkish empire. The very nature of this state association excluded 'slavery' as an option for the Bulgarians. The Bulgarian tribal chieftains were neither killed nor driven away. They continued to govern their tribes. What was more, perhaps for the first time ever, they were able to see their tribes united. For, it is known that the Turkic khanate, though governed only by one ruler, was divided into eight semi-independent parts which were ruled by governors chosen from among their own people. For instance, such a governor was Gostun, mentioned in the Enrolment List of the Bulgarian khans. As early as 581 AD, as a consequence of the internal skirmishes for the throne, the khanate fell apart to form two separate khanates — eastern and western. The Bulgarians who found themselves in the western khanate had probably been, or had gradually become, the multitude of the population. Their leaders started fighting to attain the supreme power.

It seems that similar to their confreres in the Avar khanate, they did not succeed, but acted much more wisely. In 632 AD they united under Kubrat, leader of one of the tribes, broke loose from the khanate and then founded a state. Byzantine authors-contemporaries of those events, do mention a state, too. They even attribute it as 'Great'. Evidently, having observed it they noticed all signs characteristic of a state, i.e. borders, territory, economy, state structure, independent centralized rule and legislation. All these distinguished it from the tribal alliance which would, only provisionally, gather together in order to raid and plunder some province of the Byzantine empire or some other tribe which had also become rich

*Khan Kubrat's gold signet rings found at the village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century.*





from looting.

It can only be regretted that the historical sources lack any verbosity when referring to the first head of the Bulgarian state.

The earliest Bulgarian chronicle, the Enrolment List of the Bulgarian khans, informs us that he was from the Dulo clan. The chronicle of the Byzantine patriarch Nicephorus who lived a century later, states that he was Organa's nephew. As to who Organa was, it could undoubtedly be said that he was an important person the ancients had known but had failed to tell about. It is only logical to assume that he had probably been a proxy of the western part of the Turkic khanate, comprising Bulgarian tribes as well.

It is difficult to specify the exact date of khan Kubrat's birth. Another Byzantine writer tells us that in his childhood Kubrat was sent to Constantinople for reasons unknown. He grew up in the palace of the emperor. There he was baptized as a Christian. Com-

*Gold medallion from Preslav.*

*Bronze amulet with two birds depicted on it; Veliko Turnovo.*



paring the scanty data, the historians surmised that khan Kubrat had lived in Constantinople between 610-632 AD. The uncertainties concerning the reasons why, as a child, he had been sent to the capital of the Eastern Roman empire, can be reduced to two logical possibilities: to be made a hostage or to be given education as in the case of tsar Symeon who was sent there two and a half centuries later. Kubrat could not have been a hostage since the Bulgarian tribes did not exist independently therefore, the decision as to whether there would be war with Byzantium or not did not rest with them. If Byzantium were in any position at all to require hostages from the west Turkic khanate, it would ask for the son of the ruler. This leads to the only assumption remaining that Kubrat's famous uncle had sent him out there to study.

Twenty two years of one's life spent in Constantinople — the capital city of the European civilization in that remote epoch and





for some centuries after, could be experienced in many different ways. For example, one could easily indulge in the merry and care-free life bubbling over the renowned Constantinople pubs full of frivolous even wanton young women, some or most of whom were known to be from aristocratic families.

On the other hand, Constantinople was the home of rich libraries, antique heritage and culture, as well as of the moral and aesthetic values of Christianity — the state tradition of the great empire which had remained unbent and unshakable in the wilderness of barbarity.

Despite the absence of any information we should hardly have any doubt that Kubrat made use of the high-standard education he had received and which enabled him to devour both culture and state-building experiences. It looks as if no one has yet come to realize that Kubrat spent more time studying in Constantinople than Symeon the Great or Kaloyan did.

The novelists and screen-play writers who had often represented khan Kubrat as a primitive steppe chieftain, with filthy sticky hair and with the rustic manners of an uncivilized elder, would probably have to correct their vision of the first Bulgarian ruler — one of the most learned men in Europe at that time. His life and deeds are the most eloquent testimony to this last point.



*Elongated tongue-shaped applique, part of a gold belt ornament; village of Madara, Shumen region; eighth century AD.*







## THE BIRTH OF GREAT BULGARIA

In 632 AD, according to the account of Byzantine chroniclers, khan Kubrat availed himself of the failing power of the Turkut khan, shook off the vassalage his tribe was in, and declared himself an independent ruler. Virtually all Bulgarian tribes living in the region of the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea immediately united under him. The newly founded state-like formation was evidently not a military-tribal alliance as there had been no such legal category in the antiquity, but it was a state. As such, it had a strictly outlined territory, its own administration, uniform laws (probably based on the customary law observed by the Bulgarian tribes) and its own foreign policy. It is viewed as a state both in the Bulgarian historical records of that time and in the annals of Byzantium. The Byzantine statesmen and chroniclers referred to it as Bulgaria or even Great Bulgaria. It is no accident that about that time the individual names of all Bulgarian tribes were deleted from every page written by the ancient chroniclers. Bulgarians was the only name used thereafter.

No sources bear any evidence of the Turks counteracting Kubrat's undertaking. Obviously, the khanate did not have any military capacity to make the break-away Bulgarian tribes come back to their state. Apparently, the Khazars broke away in the same manner and at the same time.

The scanty information that has come down to us from Byzantine and Armenian chronicles makes it possible to determine, though with some doubt, the boundaries of Great Bulgaria: the lower course of the Danube in the west, the Black and the Azov seas in the south, the Kuban river in the east, and the Donets river in the north. Based on some suppositions is the information about the capital of Old Great Bulgaria. It was at the town of Phanagoria on the coast of the Azov Sea.

It is clear that khan Kubrat was a man who had acquired in Byzantium great knowledge about the structure and functioning of the state machinery and who, without doubt, tried to establish a perfectly workable administration in his new state after bringing it in conformity with the local conditions and tradition. Old Great Bulgaria was ruled by a khan who made the decisions after discussing them with the Council of the Great Boyls. His deputy, effectively the second man in the administrative hierarchy, was the kavkhan. The third man was the Ichirguboyl. Both of them were high-ranking officers in the administration and in the chain of command. In time





of war they were in charge of large army units. The practice of combining administrative and military responsibilities was applied to all ranks down the hierarchy ladder, too.

It is regrettable that the ancient records contain very little information about the domestic and international policies of Bulgaria in the reign of khan Kubrat. Raised and educated in Byzantium, baptized as a Christian and known as a personal friend of emperor Heraclius, the khan maintained peaceful neighbourly relations with the empire up till the end of his rule. In 635 AD these relations were impressed with a signature and a seal affixed to an inter-state agreement — an indirect act of recognition of the new state. Khan Kubrat was honoured with the title of a patrician. Judging by some events after Heraclius's death, we could say that khan Kubrat's friendship with the emperor was of a purely human nature, too. Running the risk of worsening relations with Byzantium, upon the death of the emperor in 642 AD, khan Kubrat supported his widow Martina and their children to whom he had been strongly attached, in their battle for the emperor's throne.

According to the Ethiopian chronicler Joan Niciusky, just the news of khan Kubrat backing up Martina and her children had risen in arms in their support the people and the army of Constantinople under a certain Jutalius, the son of Constantine. The Ethiopian chronicle also sheds light on the fact that khan Kubrat was already in conflict with some barbarian tribes along the border. However, his being baptized as a Christian helped his troops be victorious. This was most probably the beginning of the serious conflict with the Khazars who would later on, after Kubrat's death, tear away the eastern territories of the state and force khan Asparukh to seek territorial expansion and a city for a capital somewhere to the south of the Danube.

The war with the state of the Khazars was the second and last occasion on which the then chroniclers cared to record an event of the relations of the Bulgarian state with other states at the time of khan Kubrat's rule. The rest of the neighbouring peoples were rather loosely-knit to try their strength against the Bulgarians or to submit any claims to them. The Khazar state, established on the northern Caspian Sea coast, proclaimed itself a successor to the Turkic khanate and, on these grounds, claimed all its former lands and tribes in the east. However, it was they who formed the territory and the population of Bulgaria.

The conflict looked imminent and inevitable but its vicissitudes had regrettably never become known to us. Some indirect sources of reference, as quoted above, indicate that the raids had been beaten off successfully, at least up till Kubrat's death.

A close study of the text of a medieval legend, cited as an example of political wisdom, has brought out some information

*Vessel from the proto-Bulgarian gold treasure found at Nagy Sankt Miklos, Romania.*







about the Bulgarian public opinions after the long-lasting war with the Khazars. This is the legend which has come down to us from Byzantine chroniclers. It goes that at his death bed khan Kubrat bid his sons to break a bundle of vine twigs. None of them succeeded. Then Kubrat, himself, took the vine shoots and broke them one by one with his old frail hands. The moral was clear — as long as the Bulgarians and their political leaders are united, Bulgaria will be invincible. If they allowed a split or dissension in their community and in their actions, they would be destroyed one by one, causing Bulgaria to be swept away, too.

Wanting to give this lesson to his closest kin, khan Kubrat must have had serious doubts and worries about some trends in the Bulgarian political statecraft engendered by the Khazar invasion. And these doubts were well justified. The successful repulsion of the Khazar raids was at the cost of numerous victims and heavy losses for the economy. The Bulgarian lands were all plains offering no natural shelters, and thus being an easy pillaging target for the attacking Khazar cavalry. Perhaps hundreds of villages, crops and herds had been plundered or set on fire before the Bulgarian troops could locate, overpower and eventually destroy the Khazar invaders. Most Bulgarians were aware that their lands occupied a strategic position at the major junction of routes called the Great Road of the peoples migrating from Asia and Europe, and that even if the Khazar raids against Bulgaria were stopped and the Khazars completely destroyed, other peoples would soon rush to take their place at lightning speed. The developments that followed khan Kubrat's death indicate that part of the Bulgarians, or rather their political leaders, had insisted on the state being defended only within its existing territories (khan Kubrat had evidently belonged to that group, and his supreme power and prestige had those who disagreed with his policy refrain from action). Now, having long real-

*Asparukh crossing the Danube. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*



*Gold buckle, an item of the gold treasure of khan Kubrat; village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.*



ized that the prospects to keep these territories intact were very slim, they also began to insist on conquering new lands blessed with natural defence lay, natural resources and better climate. However, within that group there were also conflicting opinions: some of them insisted on looking for these new lands far enough from the Road of the peoples and from strong neighbouring state formations; the others were concerned only about the quality of the new lands and had no fears regarding any potential contenders of their possessions. As proof of the existence of such diversity comes the fact that upon khan Kubrat's death some Bulgarians set out to the north and founded a new state near the upper course of the Volga, while others extended Bulgaria into territories south of the Danube and moved the capital city there.

Kubrat died in 651 AD. It was once believed that this had happened in Phanagoria, the capital city of his realms. However, the new reading of a sumptuous burial, advanced by the German academic Joachim Werner, shows that Kubrat had died hundreds of kilometers further up to the north, in the present-day steppes of Ukraine. The German scholar's interpretation has also allowed to take a better look at the khan's last efforts as a statesman. It is worth devoting some space to the end of this great Bulgarian leader and to his last resting place.

In 1912 an exceptionally rich burial was discovered in the sand dunes of the Vorskla river near the Ukrainian village of Malaya Pereshchepina, 13 km away from the town of Poltava. The deceased was buried in a wooden coffin, set with 250 rectangular gold plates, 6.5x5.5 cm each. A considerable number of utensils made of precious metals (20 silver and 17 gold), arms inlaid with precious metal, a gold horn and a gold spoon — symbols of authority, 69 gold coins, a gold buckle weighing almost half a kilogram, gold rings, etc. were arranged around the body. The find obviously made its first researchers specify the burial as the last abode of not only a rich or high-born chieftain, but also the head of state of any one of the barbarian formations which had possessed those lands for any length of time.

The utensils were of no great importance for determining the precise 'age' of the treasure since they had obviously been collected over a 200-year period. However, the 'youngest' coins of emperor Constantine II of Byzantium were dated 647 AD. This gave clear proof that the burial had taken place after that date. Some of the pots, an integral part of the Christian cults, indicated that the man buried was a Christian.

The above facts alone lead to the conclusion that of all possible potentates who had ruled tribes or states in those times, khan Kubrat was the one corresponding to the archeological findings concerning the burial near Malaya Pereshchepina. In 1983 Dr W.



Seibt of the Byzantine Studies Institute in Vienna managed to puzzle out the monograms on the two gold signet rings as *Khubratu*, and *Khubratu Patrichiū*. There was no further doubt that in 1912 the Russian archeologists had discovered the tomb of khan Kubrat, the founder of Great Bulgaria.

The place of the burial which was in the furthest northern point of the state, hundreds of kilometers away from its capital, puts in a totally different light the last days in the life of the great Bulgarian. It now appears that he did not meet his death as a decrepit and sick man. As a matter of fact, if in 610 AD he was still a child, then in 651 AD the khan must have been a 55 or 60-year-old man in the prime of his life. It is only logical to assume that he was leading his troops to beat off another consecutive raid of the Khazars but, this time the latter were taken unawares and defeated at the very borderline. The burial itself attests the khazars' defeat and banishment. The specially made expensive coffin, the lavish burial gifts and the strict observance of the rites showed that the funeral had taken place in a peaceful atmosphere. If this were a defeat, the khan would not have been buried at all.

Then how did the Bulgarian ruler pass away? Was he taken to bed with a treacherous illness at the time of the combat march, or did he fall during the fight with a sword in his hand, or did he die of his wounds after the victorious battle? This, unfortunately, we do not know exactly, but in fact, it makes no difference whatsoever. Khan Kubrat died in a defensive battle, safeguarding Bulgaria. There is something else that has also been causing bewilderment: why was not the khan's body taken back to the capital and buried there with the same honours? And why was his vault erected on the border itself? It seems that khan Kubrat has had time before he died to oblige his commanders bury him there, right on the borderline. In this way, he had turned his last resting place into a defender of Bulgaria, too. The enemy could not afford treading unpunished a Bulgarian grave because they cherished high the cult to their ancestors. Thus, even with his tomb khan Kubrat put his successors under the obligation to defend the borders of Bulgaria into death.



*Gold jug, an item of the treasure of khan Kubrat; Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.*

*Khan Kubrat's gold rings, items of the treasure at Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.*









## KHAN ASPARUKH – EXPANSION OF THE BULGARIAN STATE TO THE SOUTH OF THE DANUBE

After khan Kubrat's death Bulgaria suffered further Khazar raids. The Khazars succeeded in occupying the Bulgarian territories in the Caucasian region, the river valleys of the Kuban and the Don, as well as the Crimean Peninsula. Some of the Bulgarian tribes accepted their dependence on the Khazars, while others withdrew to the north, as far as the valleys of the rivers Kama and Volga. There they founded a big Bulgarian state, the so-called Volgo-Kama Bulgaria which existed up till the 13th century when it vanished under the smashing blows of the Tatars. Descendants of those Bulgarians are still extant in the present-day autonomous region of Chuvashia in Russia. In the early 70s of the 7th century khan Asparukh, khan Kubrat's successor, was already ruling over the realms between the Dnepr, the Donets and the Danube. After desperate defensive battles, he managed to drive the Khazars back across the Dnepr and to utterly defeat them, thus stopping their offensive westwards.

However, khan Asparukh was awake to his being unable to ensure a complete life for his state and for the people dwelling in the plains, the only surviving piece of Old Bulgaria — land infertile and marshy, short of natural shelters, ore deposits, and forests. It was for this reason that in the next few years the Bulgarian politicians also decided to undertake a territorial expansion campaign at the lands of ancient Moesia. According to Byzantine sources those lands had been to the Bulgarians' taste for quite some time because they were well-protected by the deep-flowing Danube in the north, by the rock fence of the Balkan Mountains in the south and

*Khan Asparukh crossing the Danube.  
Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

*The Danube.*





by the Black Sea in the east.

In those days Moesia, as well as the whole of the Balkan Peninsula were inhabited by populous Slav tribes. They almost succeeded in assimilating the native population as their presence there had lasted for nearly a century. Engaged in crippling wars with Persians and Arabs in the 6th-7th century AD, the Byzantine empire had completely lost control over its European realms. But from the middle of the 7th century AD, extricated from its solicitude in Asia Minor, Byzantium began reconquering the Balkan Peninsula. The disunited Slav tribes in Greece, Albania, Macedonia and Thrace were brought under the sway of the imperial power. With a view to resisting the Byzantine reconquest, seven Slav tribes inhabiting Moesia, entered into a military and political union but its chances to counteract efficiently the mighty empire were minimal as the Slav troops consisted only of lightly armed infantry.

In 680 AD khan Asparukh transferred a significant part of the Bulgarian army and population to the south of the Danube delta and took up the lands of present-day Dobrudja. Essentially, this move was equivalent to declaring war on the Byzantine empire. Common interests made the Slavs and the Bulgarians, both equally threatened by Byzantium, conclude a treaty under which the Slav tribes in Moesia recognized their dependence on the Bulgarian state and the latter committed itself to defend its subjects against attacks by any enemy coming from any direction.

In 680 AD, in the thick heat of the war between Byzantium and Bulgaria, Bulgarian cavalry and Slav infantry contingents struck a series of stunning blows on the Byzantine troops under the personal command of emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus. The military operations were shifted to Thrace. While the capital city of Pliska — the new state-administrative and political centre was under construction in the northeastern part of Moesia, the rumble of the Bul-

*Pliska — the eastern gate of the Grand Palace.*







garian cavalry reverbated more and more often over the hills off the Bosphorus. In the autumn of 681 AD Byzantium was forced to conclude a peace treaty with the Bulgarians. It recognized the detachment of Moesia from the empire and the Bulgarians coming to terms with the Slavs dwelling in Byzantium.

The structure of the Bulgarian state was changed to comply with the treaty between khan Asparukh and the Slav princes in Moesia. The supreme power was given to the Bulgarian aristocracy as recognition for its merits in the struggle against the external enemies of the state and the real military force supporting it. The state administration was headed by a khan whose power was hereditary. There was also a council of twelve great boyls representing the noble families. The decisions of paramount state importance were made by the so-called people's assembly — a meeting of representatives of all Bulgarian noble families and the princes of the Slav tribes dwelling in the Bulgarian state. The Slav tribes retained their internal self-government and the territories as specified in the treaty of 680 AD. Their obligation was to pay the Bulgarian central authority an annual tribute and to secure the military contingents in charge of the country's defence.

*Pliska — the eastern fortified gate.*

*Pliska — underground backstairs passage in the Little Palace.*









## CONSOLIDATION OF THE BULGARIAN STATE AND ITS TRANSFORMATION INTO EUROPEAN POLITICAL SUPER POWER 7th-9th c.

At the end of the 7th century Bulgaria occupied a comparatively small territory — the lands extending to both banks of the lower Danube, between the ridges of the Carpathians and the Balkan Range and reaching the lower course of the Dniepr in the east. Its limited human, economic and military resources did not promise particularly good future to the infant state with its borders cornered by ten times as much powerful enemies such as Byzantium in the south, the Avar khanate in the heartland of Europe and the steppe peoples dashing at Europe from the east. In the tangle of interstate relations in this part of Europe during the 8th century, the Bulgarian statesmen showed surprising political tact in steering the state boat to a salutary coast. Dramatic incidents, however, failed them: right at the beginning of 8th century the Arab invasion extended to Europe via Gibraltar and the Bosphorus. In the west, the fanatical warriors of Mohammed conquered the Iberian Peninsula to be checked only by Charles Martel in the battle at Poitiers in 732 AD. It was going to take a few hundred years to drive them out of Spain. The situation in the east was even more dramatic. About 716 AD the whole of Byzantium was trodden over by Arab cavalry hooves and its capital squeezed in the steel belt of siege and starvation ready to surrender. At this point, although not threatened yet, the Bulgarians put their oar in the conflict which had created such a frightful menace to the medieval European civilization. In that same year, 716 AD, the Bulgarian heavy cavalry under the command of khan Tervel came forward at the porte of Constantinople. After the two-

*General view of the wreath-shaped cliffs at the village of Madara, Shumen region; high up on one of them is the carving of the Madara Horseman.*

*A close-up view of the Madara Horseman bas-relief; seventh century AD; UNESCO listed monument.*







*Khan Krum's warriors pursuing and wounding Stauricius — the son and heir of Nicephorus; miniature from the Bulgarian recension of the Manasses chronicle; fourteenth century; kept at the Apostolic Library in Vatican.*

year-long fighting the Bulgarians and the Byzantines succeeded in crippling the Arab horse-mounted troops. In a crucial battle in 718 AD the Bulgarian cavalry defeated the Arabs. The rest of the Arab army was finished off by the Bulgarians in the next couple of days. This blow put an end to the Arabs attempting to penetrate into the Old Continent through the Balkan Peninsula. It earned the Bulgarians and their ruler khan Tervel enormous popularity in the eyes of the European political and cultural circles. An evidence of this is the fact that right until the 17th century West European authors, unaware of the details in the Bulgarian history, used to associate khan Tervel's name with important political and cultural events which had taken place in Bulgaria, but at a different time.

*Under khan Krum (803-814) Bulgaria's southern border extended far into the recesses of the Strandja mountain.*

Still more fateful events took place during the second half of the 8th century. In 756 AD Byzantium concentrated all its forces into one campaign of a series of assaults, aiming at the destruction







of the Bulgarian state. In the course of several dozens of years, fierce battles took place in the plains of Thrace and in the Balkan Range passes. Towards the end of the 8th century, at the cost of great efforts, the Bulgarians succeeded in withstanding the Byzantine aggression and in coming out of this 'duel' with insignificant territorial losses.

These events served as an unmistakable indication to the Bulgarian state rulers that there was need for a new state and political conception which should be capable of reducing the perennial menace to the independence of Bulgaria. The basic principles of this new line were formulated during the rule of khan Krum (803-814). They had strictly been observed for over half a century by most of the Bulgarian political minds during the rule of khan Omurtag (814-831), khan Malamir (831-837) and khan Presian (837-852). These principles emphasized the need for Bulgaria to become a

*Fortress wall encircling the medieval town of Dristra (modern Silistra) which accommodated the see of the Bulgarian patriarch in the reign of tsar Symeon (893-927) and tsar Peter (927-970).*



state equal in territory, population, economy and military strength to the European political giants which had taken shape in those times, e.g. the empire of the Franks. About the year 800 AD it had conquered to the west all barbarian state formations which had mushroomed on to the ruins of the Roman empire and to the east — Byzantium which, by then, had reconquered or rather retrieved its possessions in Asia Minor and the Balkans that were swept over by Arabs and Slavs in the 6th and 7th centuries. The Bulgarian state leadership visualised the specific ways and means for the implementation of this idea as follows: joining forces with the Slavs on the Balkans and in Central Europe which were still under Avar, Frank, Byzantine and Khazar domination; abolishing the *federatae* of the existing state structure; and, turning the state into centralized monarchy. Evidently, this idea was based on the natural gravitation of the Slav and the Bulgarian tribes, still under foreign rule, towards

*Ninth century Bulgarian warriors depicted on a miniature illustration from the Menology of emperor Basil II of the 11th c.; kept at the Apostolic Library in Vatican.*







*Khan Omurtag at the walls of Madara.  
Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

*Ninth-century inscription on the Column  
of khan Omurtag.*

the Bulgarian state.

The recantation of the moderate wait-and-see policy in favour of the cleverly calculated expansion gave its results. At the very end of the 8th century and at the beginning of the 9th century Bulgaria joined forces with the Frankish empire of Charles the Great in destroying the Avar khanate in Central Europe and annexing its lands inhabited by Bulgarians and Slavs in Transilvania. In 807 AD Bulgaria attacked Byzantium and after a dramatic battle that lasted nearly seven years, it had Thrace and Northern Macedonia detached from the empire of the Romans. During the reign of khan Omurtag (814-831) the Bulgarians took the offensive against the empire of the Franks. Under the peace treaty of 831 Pannonia (present-day Hungary) which was conquered in 829, remained within the borders of Bulgaria. Khan Malamir (831-837) and khan Presian (837-852) renewed the expansion campaign against Byzantium which led to their annexing to Bulgaria its present-day mountains to the south: Rhodopes, Rila and Pirin, as well as the northern coast of the Aegian and Macedonia. Thus by 852 Bulgaria, comprising the territories of Pannonia (present-day Hungary), Transilvania, Wallachia (present-day Romania), Moldavia, Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia with their numerous inhabitants, was already a European super-power.





Il trionfo Regi cruce





## BULGARIA – CENTRALISED MONARCHY

Under Krum (803-814) and Omurtag (814-831) the independence of the Slav principalities was eliminated. The enormous territory of the country was divided into eleven administrative areas — one of them was the capital and was called internal area and the other ten were external. They were not governed by people who had the hereditary right to do so, but by officials appointed by the central power. The boundaries of the administrative areas did not have anything in common with the boundaries of the various Slav, Avar and other tribes. Thus, from a federation of voluntarily associated tribes, Bulgaria became an early feudal centralized monarchy.

The wars, the territorial acquisitions, and the requirements for control over the new territories caused large-scale population shifts. A large part of the initial compact main body of the Bulgarians established in Dobrudja got dispersed in many small detached places in strategic centres all over the vast country. The removal of the boundaries between the Slav tribes speeded up the process of population diffusion. The latter, in its turn, gave rise to a new ethno-demographic development — the building up of a united Bulgarian nation. Towards the middle of the 9th century, both Byzantine and West European chroniclers ceased to use different names for the different tribes dwelling in Bulgaria. At that time they were already referring to the state of the 'numerous Bulgarians'. A prodigy — the new ethnic category 'a Bulgarian people', appeared as the finale of these developments: it took its name from the Turkic Bul-

*Khan Krum feasting his victory over Byzantine emperor Nicephorus; miniature from the Bulgarian recension of the Manasses chronicle; kept at the Apostolic Library, Vatican.*

*Khan Krum before the walls of Constantinople. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*

*Mezek — medieval fortress in the region of Haskovo.*





garians and its language from the Slavs. Both in Old Bulgarian and in the contemporary written and spoken language of the Bulgarian nation, there have survived only a few thousand words of the language of the small but highly mettled and organised ancient Bulgarian race which ventured and eventually succeeded in founding its own state on the most contended land on the European continent.

The consolidation of the Bulgarian nation in the middle of 9th century came up against a stumbling block — the religious pluralism among the Bulgarian subjects. It is difficult to enumerate all religions and the heretic diversions from them, all peacefully co-existing before the condescending eyes of the authorities. The Turkic Bulgarians believed in Tangra, the God-Heaven. Part of them were Christians. The Slavs were polytheists — their chief deities' idols Perun, Lada and Volos were patrons of large territories in Moesia,

*Khan Omurtag combatting the Christian sermons preached by Byzantine prisoners of war and bishop Manuel dies a martyr's death; miniature from a manuscript of John Scilitza's chronicle; now at the National Library in Madrid.*

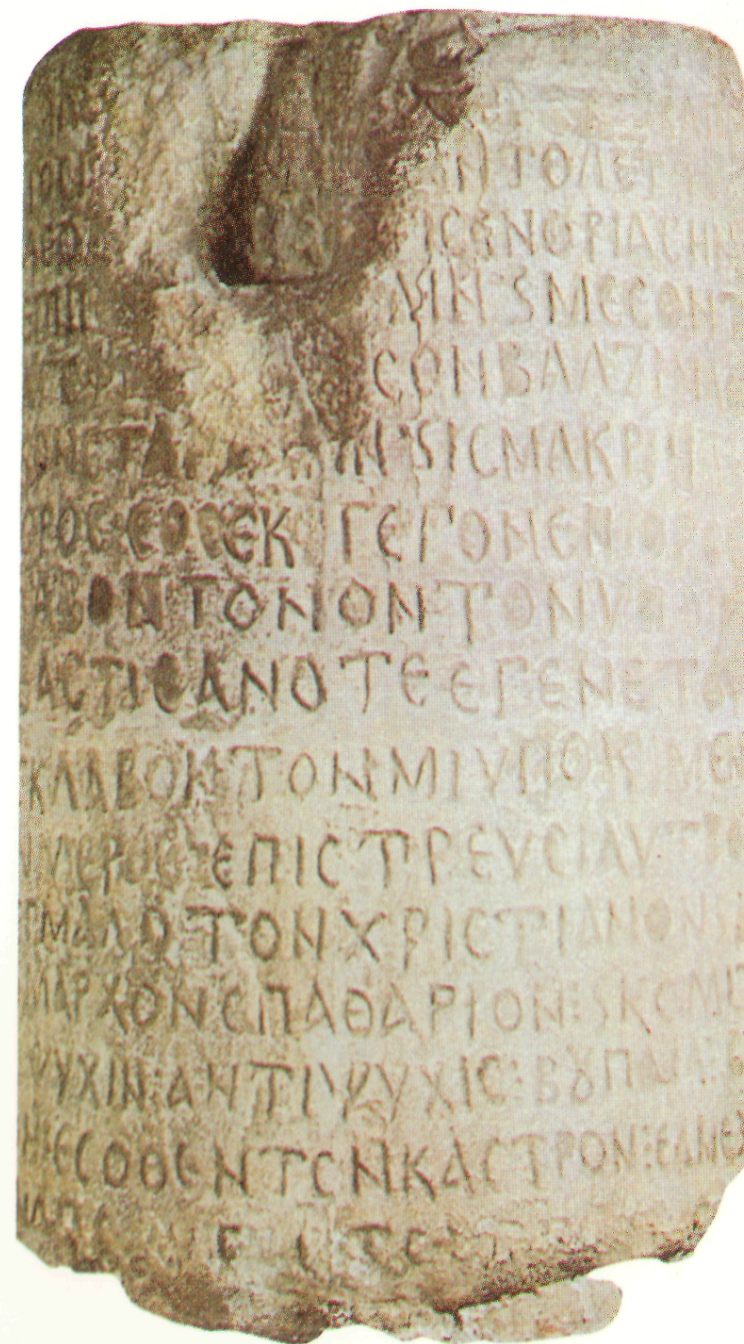






Pannonia, part of Macedonia, Wallachia and Moldavia. The areas in Thrace and Macedonia which had been detached from Byzantium were inhabited by Christianized Slavs and Thracians some of whom were adherents of various Christian heresies. The Christian preachers demonstrated the zeal of the early Christian missionaries in conducting active religious propaganda in the heathen-populated areas. We can judge of their success by the facts about Christianized members of noble families from 830 AD onwards, as reported by West European chroniclers. Although less successful, the Jewish and the Muslim missionaries also conducted religious propaganda during the first half of the 9th century.

The problem was not so much in the ethnic or language differences as in the impossibility to have the population of the state observe only one consistent law. According to medieval practices still valid in some Muslim countries, each religious group acknowledged as its own basic law the code of moral and legal norms, inherent to the respective religious doctrine. This led to mutual contradictions between the various religious communities as well as between their attitudes and the requirements of the centralized monarchy. This problem confronted the Bulgarian political minds and demanded prompt resolution.



*Oustra — medieval fortress in the Rhodope mountain.*

*Column with Bulgarian inscription in Greek meant to perpetuate a 30-year peace concluded between Bulgarians and Byzantines in 815 AD.*







## CONVERSION OF THE BULGARIAN PEOPLE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. BIRTH OF OLD BULGARIAN LETTERS AND CHRISTIAN CULTURE

In 852 AD khan Boris ascended to the Bulgarian throne. Having inherited an enormous state this Bulgarian ruler took part in the high European politics over a period of ten years. As early as 853 AD, in alliance with the king of France Charles the Bald, he got entangled in the war against a coalition formed by the West Germanic kingdom and Croatia. In 862, this time in alliance only with the West Germanic kingdom, Bulgaria waged war on Great Moravia and Byzantium. In those crippling wars which did not change the territorial status quo of Bulgaria, it became quite clear that the loyalty of a population practising different religions would be hard to maintain by drawing force from brandishing swords. The contacts with the European Christian countries convinced the Bulgarian politicians that despite its military might Bulgaria held an inequatable position on the international stage. This was obviously a result of the officially declared pagan nature of the Bulgarian state.

Khan Boris and the supreme leaders of the Bulgarian aristocracy in the capital decided to adopt the Christian faith as the one and only official religion of the Bulgarians and the state. Contacts were established with the German king Ludowig I, who undertook the obligation to send over his preachers while the Bulgarians had to submit to the Roman Catholic church in religious and administrative respect. The news caused the immediate response of Byzantium which declared war on Bulgaria. The appearance of a powerful Catholic power right at the threshold of the Greek-Orthodox Constantinople (it, apparently, had already entered into a conflict with

*Prince Boris standing against gold background with a cross in his hand and a halo-crown on his head, miniature from Constantine of Preslav's Didactic Gospel; Russian transcription of the thirteenth century kept at the National Museum of History in Moscow.*

*Gold discus with liturgy text in Greek engraved on it; ninth century; kept at the National Museum of History in Sofia.*

*Khan Boris I's baptizing as a Christian. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*







*Triplicate cross from Pliska; ninth or tenth century. Two of the crosses are made of gold and have Christian scenes in chronological order depicted on them and the third one is made of wood.*

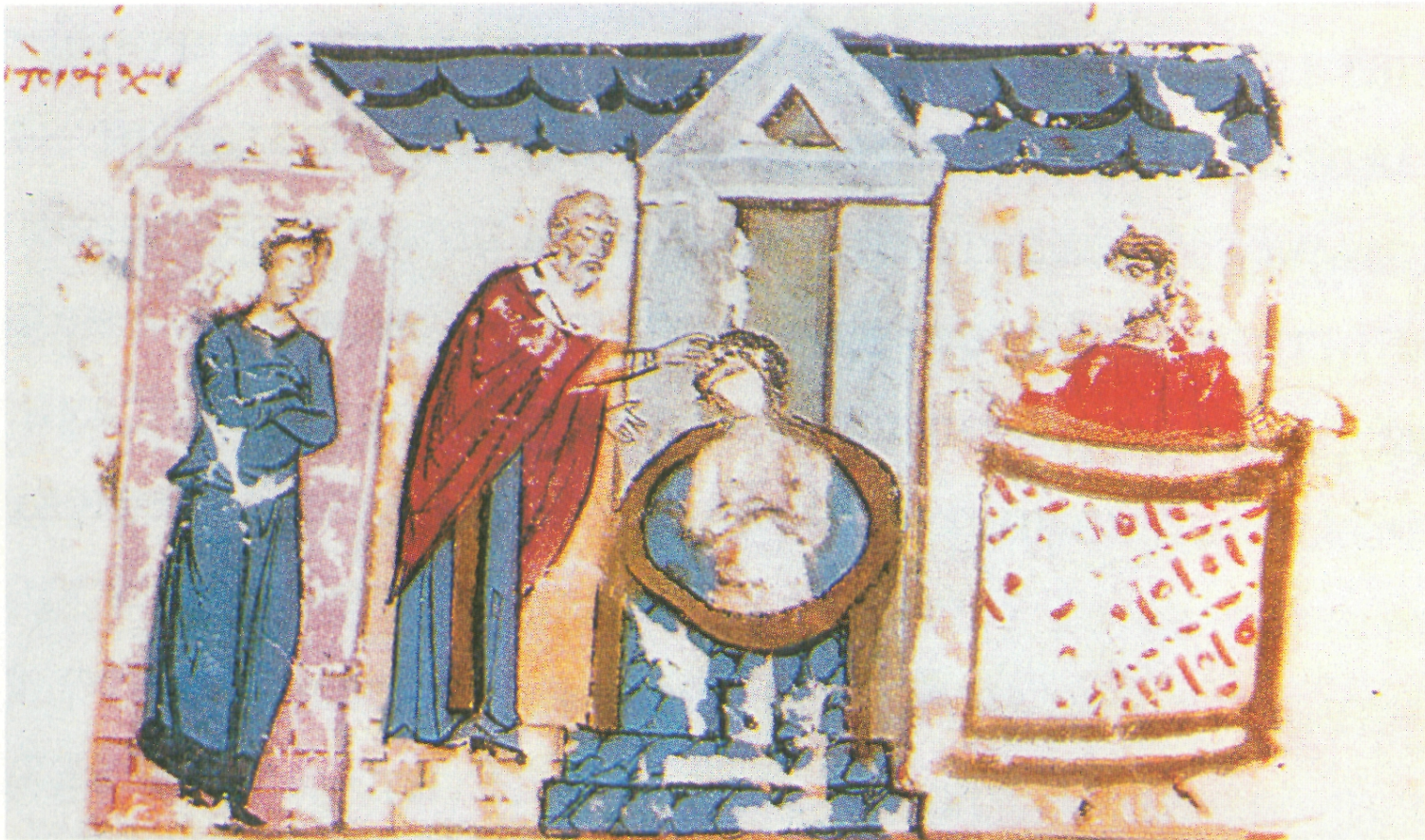
*Tsar Boris I pacifying rebellious boyars. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*

Rome) foretold frightful future for the Eastern Roman emperors. Khan Boris did not venture on hostilities with a population exhausted by one of the heaviest droughts in memory and by an earthquake that had lasted 40 days. At the border, the Byzantine troops were met by Bulgarian envoys who announced the decision of the Bulgarians to assume the Christian faith from Constantinople, which signified an observance of the Eastern Greek Orthodox rite. In practice, this meant that the Bulgarian dioceses would be subordinated to the patriarchate in Constantinople. The Byzantine emperor Michael III (842-867) who had set out on a campaign against his strong neighbour obviously with a sinking heart, suddenly felt happy that he could come out of the battle with flying colours and did not only agree with the Bulgarian proposition but also ceded to Bulgaria the region of Zagora in southern Thrace.

In 863 Christianity was proclaimed as the official state religion and the conversion of all non-Christians was started. The enforcement of Christianity did not go without perturbations directed not so much against the religion itself, as against the Christian legislation code brought from Byzantium and introduced in Bulgaria. Part of the aristocracy in the external areas rose in a rebellion against Boris but it was suppressed by the central power quickly and without much of a bloodshed. As soon as the end of that same year, the Bulgarian ruler subordinated the Bulgarian church to the Roman Pope. Concerned about the future of the state, Boris saw the danger of the Bulgarian clergy, having been administratively subordinated to Constantinople, to become a conductor of foreign interests. The papacy which was not backed up by any genuine military power at that time seemed to Boris inclined to allow greater independence to the Bulgarian clergy and thus, more opportunities for control on the part of the political power. The political alliance with the West Germanic kingdom was renewed, too. The Roman Catho-







Conversion of Royal Preslav court to Christianity; miniature from the manuscript of John Scilitza, kept at the National Library in Madrid.

lic clergymen who came to Bulgaria escorting the future Pope Formose, gradually drove off the Greek priests and took over the spiritual life of the newly baptised Bulgarians in their hands. However, the see in Rome did not agree to give the Bulgarian dioceses autonomy greater than the autonomy allowed under the traditional organisation of the Catholic church. For that reason, about 870 AD Boris again oriented the subordination of the Bulgarian Christians toward Byzantium which had already become susceptible to certain compromise on that so important a matter. The church in Constantinople gave its consent to the acknowledgement of the autocephaly of one single Bulgarian archbishopric, comprising all Bulgarian lands and connected *de jure* with the oecumenical patriarchate. *De facto* that meant independence for the Bulgarian church and a possibility for the Bulgarian political leaders to have control over their prelates' activities, i.e. the dependence on Constantinople was purely formal. Byzantium was made to accept the facts such as they were. It sought consolation in the expectation that the Greek language used in public worship, in the cultural and official state doings throughout Bulgaria after its forced conversion to Christianity, would act as a powerful weapon for the gradual cutting the ground under the feet of the Bulgarian nation and its structures of state power.

Thus Bulgaria, once and for all, committed its church to the patriarchal see of Constantinople, and its political and cultural destiny to that of the Orthodox Christianity of the East. The date of this act was actually the date of birth of the Slavo-Byzantine cultural community, which was to gradually shape up and evolve in after-years and centuries as root, substance and content of the East European civilization during the Middle Ages.

Obviously the danger of national decomposition from an ethnic, linguistic and cultural point of view was not to be ignored. All

Triplicate cross from Pliska; ninth century.







St.st. Cyril and Methodius, icon painted by Stanislav Dospevski; 1860.

Page of the Assemanes's Gospel — an Old Bulgarian Glagolitic manuscript; now at the Apostolic Library in Vatican; eleventh century.

churches, from the huge basilicas in the capital down to the modest parish churches in the villages, conducted their service in Greek. The training of Bulgarian clergymen was performed in Greek, similar to that of the future administration servants for the state machinery at all levels.

The invention and the dissemination of literacy and books in the then spoken Bulgarian language is one of the most significant facts in the political and cultural history of Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. This event is associated with the names of Constantine Cyril the Philosopher and his brother Methodius who invented the earliest Bulgarian alphabet and translated the principal books of the Christian doctrine into the Christian ideological and theoretical heritage.

The scarce historical sources, all of which of West European and Old Bulgarian origin, report that the two brothers were born in





Thessalonica, sons of a noble Byzantine family of Slav-Bulgarian lineage. Having received good education, they both made a fast career in the higher Byzantine administration. In the early 50s of the 9th century, however, a strange volte-face, by all researchers' accounts, occurred in their life. They retired voluntarily from active social life to seclusion in a monastery where, in the course of several years, they succeeded in devising the Old Bulgarian alphabet and translating part of the liturgical books into Old Bulgarian.

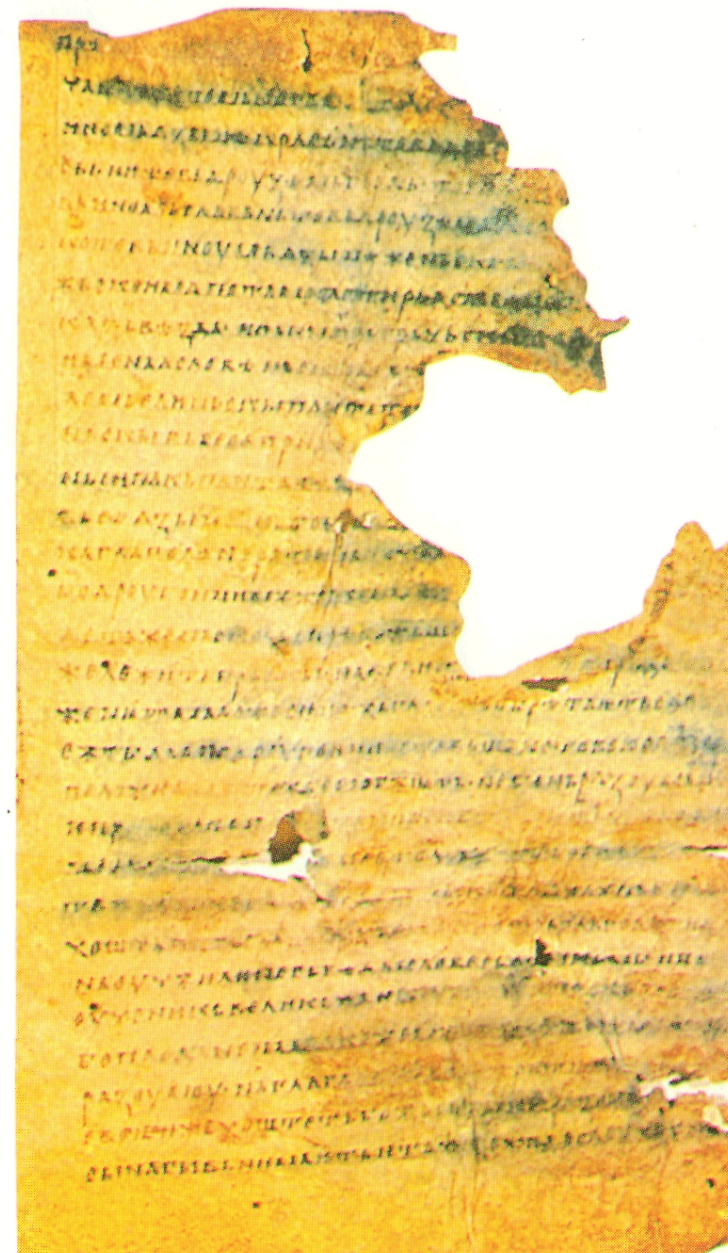
It is not fortuitous that the historians describe this step as being 'strange'. In those days no one needed the Old Bulgarian alphabet and books. For a few more years Bulgaria was to remain a pagan country, whereas the small number of Slavs back in Byzantium had long before been converted to Christianity. The motivation of the two brothers' Christian missionary zeal, as Christian historians saw it, was meant to facilitate the spread and the faster adoption of the Christian faith by the Slav peoples. This could only partly be true for the simple reason that the Byzantine political minds were perfectly aware that the Greek language in public worship was a powerful means for their influence on the Slavs both within the empire and beyond its borders. They would have never allowed and, indeed, they did not, that the Old Bulgarian language be transferred to Bulgaria nor that it be used in the empire. It is then difficult to believe that those two men, occupying high positions and having excellent career opportunities, would possibly abandon everything for the sake of some dubious contentment to indulge themselves in something that stands no chance to be put into practice ever.

Therefore, the assumption of some West European researchers for some preliminary agreement between khan Boris and the two brothers resting on their shared sense of duty to the Bulgarian people, does not seem most unlikely. Reconstruction of the events along these lines suggests that Boris conceived the idea of adopting Christianity at the very beginning of his reign (it truly, coincided with Cyril and Methodius's retiring to a monastery) but he was afraid to take immediate steps in that direction, mainly because he anticipated a threat of this act producing a negative effect on the yet not so strong Bulgarian ethnos. Both brothers committed themselves to inventing the weapon which would eliminate that threat and to bringing it in conformity with the laws of the time. For, the invention of the Old Bulgarian alphabet and its introduction in church and state usage could not, in itself, meet the cause of curbing the danger of nationality erosion. In medieval Europe at that time, both in the East and in the West, the so-called trilingual dogma predominated in full swing. According to it the Christian faith could be practised only in the three languages blessed by God: Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Without the supreme priesthood of Europe, the papacy and the patriarchate in Constantinople sanc-



*The front-page of 'Shestodnev' (Hexaemeron) by John the Exarch; thirteenth century transcription, now at the National Museum of History in Moscow.*

*'An Account of the Miracle Performed on the Bulgarian' — Old Bulgarian book; tenth century.*





tioning the Old Bulgarian letters and books, they would have automatically been declared a heresy and the Bulgarians, who had adopted them, heretics. From an international angle this would have certainly detracted a lot from the advantages of Christianization and would have placed Bulgaria and the Bulgarians in an even less favourable position.

The scanty information about those times does not actually allow to determine with certainty the motivation and the feelings of the *dramatis personae* concerned. It is, however, a fact that the events have developed according to the above scenario. In 862 AD Rostislav, the Grand prince of Moravia, who had also anticipated danger for his people from the Christian faith being taught by German priests in Latin, asked the Byzantine emperor to send over Slavonic language preachers. Just at that time the Old Bulgarian language was rather close to all dialects in the family of Slavonic



*Lime-stone inscribed with runic signs from Biala, Varna region; eighth or ninth century.*



*Mid-eleventh century Bulgarian Cyrillic-script monument known as the Apostle of Enina; kept at the St. Cyril and Methodius Library in Sofia.*



St Nahum — fourteenth century icon from Ohrida.

'On Letters' — Old Bulgarian Discourse by Chernorizets Hrabur (the brave monk), dating from the end of the ninth century.



КОМОЖЕ ТЪСА ПИСАТИ ДОБРО ТЪТЪСКИ  
 АН ПИСАНЫ БЪ. НАН ЖИВЪТЪ. НАН  
 ЗЪАЩ. НАН ЦРКОВЬ. НАН ТААННЪ. НАН  
 ШИРЪТА. НАН ДАДЪ. НАН ЖДОУ. НАН  
 ЮНОСТЪ. НАН ЖЪЗЫКЪ. НАН МАЛОБНА  
 СНАЛЪ. НАН ТАКОБЪШЖАМНОГАЛЪТА.  
 ПОТОДАЖЕ ТАКОЛЮБЕЦЪБЪ СТРОЖИВЪ.  
 ИМЕОСТАВЪЖА ТАТАРОДАБЕЗЪРАЗУМА.  
 ПЖИСАКЪРАЗУМАЛУПРИВОДАНЕСПЕ  
 НИЮ. ПОМНАОВАВЪРОДЪТАТЪ. ПОСА  
 НАЛЪРЪГОКЪСТАНИНАФИЛОСОФА  
 НАНЦАЕМАГОКНРНАА. МЖЖАПРАВЕ  
 ДНАН ИСТИНА. ИСТЪВОРИНАМЪЛ.  
 ПИСМЕНАНОСМЪ. ОВАДЪОПОУТИНОУ  
 ГРЪТЪСКИХЪПИСАМЕНЪ. ОВАЖЕПОСЛО  
 ВЪНЕТЪНРЪТН. ОПРЪВАГОЖЕНАТЕ  
 НЪПОГРЪТЪСКОУ. ОМНОУБОЛАФА.  
 АСЪАЗЪ. ОАЖАНАТАТЪОБОЕ. НА  
 КОЖЕОМНОПОДОВАЛШЕСАЖИДОВЪСКИ  
 АМЪПИСАМЕНЕМЪСЪТВОРИШЪ, ЧАКОН  
 СЪГРЪТЪСКИМЪ. ЖИДОВЕКЪПРЪВОЕ  
 ПИСМАНАМАТЪАЛЪФЪ. ЕЖЕАСНАЗД

languages. The flexible political leadership of Byzantium sensed an unforeseen opportunity to come into good position in a Central European country, a position it had never had to that date. This prompted Byzantium not to hesitate at the sanctity of the trilingual dogma. With the permission and blessing of the emperor and the patriarch, Cyril and Methodius were sent to Great Moravia where they embarked on organising not only Slavonic liturgy and the translation of new books, but also on founding schools teaching the new alphabet. The mission of the two brothers faced the fierce resistance of the German clergymen. The latter's attempts to keep the positions of liturgy in Great Moravia being conducted in the native language were encouraged only by the benevolence of the Great Moravian prince. To their own surprise, Pope Hadrian II (867-872), backed up the idea of Slavonic liturgy for circumstantial political reasons. Cyril died in Rome in 869 AD and Methodius was



consecrated as a bishop of Pannonia. Intrigues made by German clergymen sent him into exile to Elvangel. Upon his release by Pope John VIII, Methodius got promoted to the archbishop's order. The Slavonic liturgy received another sanction by the pope.

Boris who kept a close eye on the titanic struggle of the two brothers did not miss to send a few Bulgarians, the sons of noble families, to the school of Methodius. That was a well-timed step for, despite the canonical recognition attained, shortly after Methodius's death in 885 AD, the whole work on the Slavonic liturgy and the Slavonic script was on the brink of complete failure. The pope declared the election of the new Slavonic archbishop Gorazd illegal and void. Slavonic liturgy was banned from the churches. Methodius's disciples, about 200 of them, were arrested, imprisoned and later sold into bondage. Those of the disciples who were Bulgarian nationals — Clement, Nahum, Angelarius, Laurentius

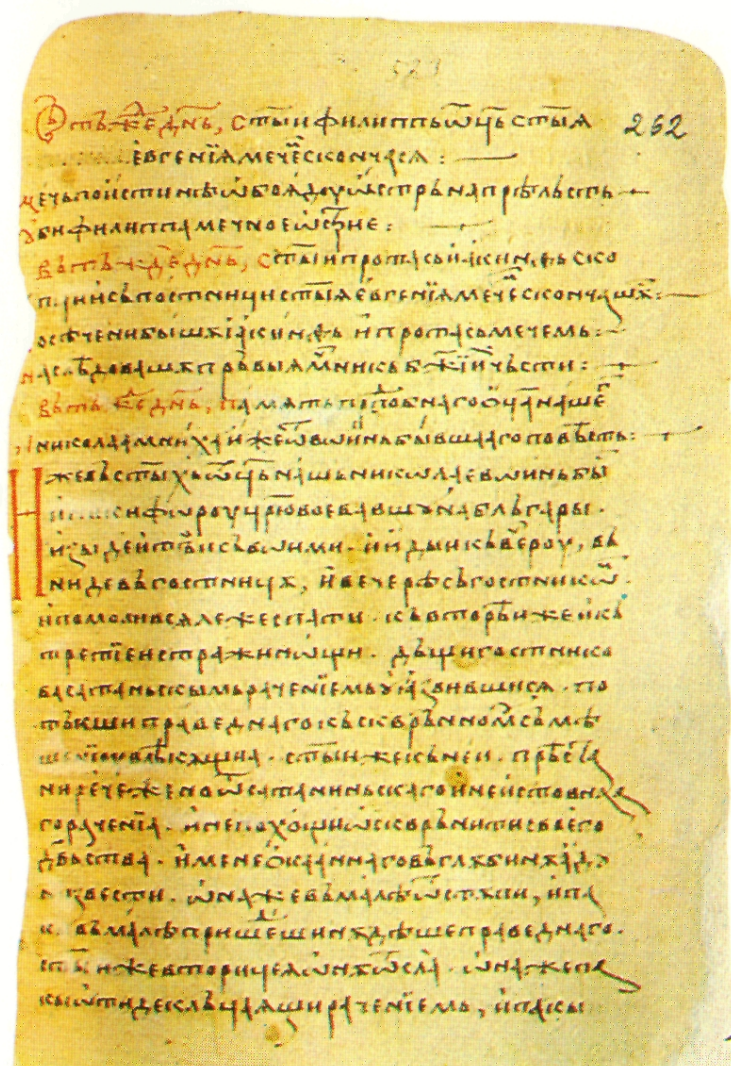
*History of the Bulgarian Slavs. Artist Nikola Kozhukharov.*





The Holy Seven disciples, fourteenth century icon from Ohrida.

Thirteenth century transcription of a page from John the Exarch's 'Shestodnev' (Hexahemeron).



and Gorazd were deported to Bulgaria. Later, some of the survivors who had been sold as slaves, led by Constantine the Priest, also returned to Bulgaria, redeemed by Orthodox merchants.

The Bulgarian ruler teamed up with the flock of Cyril and Methodius's disciples to draw up a plan for the gradual replacement of Greek in church service and in state matters with Old Bulgarian. Due to the absence of enlighteners and books this plan was to be implemented for years on end.

Boris's generous financial and political support helped Cyril and Methodius's disciples set up several training centres for Bulgarian clergymen and men of letters. They were taught there in their native tongue. Constantine proved particularly active in the capital city of Pliska, while Clement concentrated on Ohrida. Not only did he educate 3 500 followers for a short time, but also simplified the alphabetical script and called it Cyrillic, in honour of his



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*St. Clement of Ohrida depicted on silver and gilt repousse casing for a Book of four gospels.*

*St. Clement — fourteenth century icon from Ohrida.*

teacher. This is, as a matter of fact, the alphabet used to this day by the peoples dwelling in the territories from the Pacific Ocean to Central Europe: Bulgarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Serbians, as well as the nationals of the Republic of Macedonia.

After eight years of strenuous preparation of the Bulgarian clergy and their mastering the Old Bulgarian literary language, in 893 AD the general assembly of the nation, specially convened for the occasion, formally decreed the introduction of Old Bulgarian as the official language of the Bulgarian state and church. The administration of the church passed into the hands of Bulgarians. Thus, the last hold-back to the establishment of a united Bulgarian nation and to its consolidation was overcome.







## BULGARIA – A PREDOMINANT POWER IN THE EUROPEAN EAST 893-967 AD

In 889 AD, after too long a life and reign Boris, the Baptist of the Bulgarian people, renounced the throne of his own will, gave it to his son Vladimir-Rassate (889-893) and retired to a monastery in the vicinity of the capital. The new Bulgarian ruler made some attempts in favour of paganism. Boris, however, relying on his policy-supporting Bulgarian aristocracy, deposed his son and blinded him. Subsequently, his younger son, Symeon (893-927) ascended to the Bulgarian throne.

According to Byzantine chroniclers, tsar Symeon was a 'child of peace', for he was born after the conversion of Bulgaria to Christianity. Boris had earlier made plans for him to take the helm of the Bulgarian church. He sent still immature Symeon to the Magnaura school in Constantinople, it being the only university in Europe at that time, considering the curriculum and the level of its presentation. The young Bulgarian manifested rare gifts and graduated from Magnaura with flying colours. Because of his proficiency in ancient culture, his contemporaries used to call him 'demi-Greek'. It is worth reminding that in those days the Byzantines used to call themselves 'Romei', that is Romans, and the name 'Greek' was used to refer to the Hellenians, i.e. the ancient Greeks. Such was the situation that Symeon's headdress was not the tiara of an archbishop as Boris had intended, but the crown of the Bulgarian head of state.

The new Bulgarian ruler had been only a few days in power when his abilities and determination were 'tested' by the Byzantine emperor. He decreed that the Bulgarian merchants' trading depot be transferred from Constantinople to Thessalonica which eventually led to considerable economic losses. Symeon tried to seek solution to the problem through diplomatic channels, but to no avail. Reading the emperor's act as *casus belli*, Symeon declared war on Byzantium in 984 AD. The Bulgarian army invaded Thrace and struck several heavy blows on the Byzantine troops. That was the beginning of decades long Bulgarian-Byzantine mutual defiance that lasted up till the very end of Symeon's reign.

The cause for the conflict was obviously neither the place of the trade depot nor the insult on the Bulgarian state prestige. It was not the wounded self-esteem of the Bulgarian ruler either. This time the reasons did not relate to the disputed possession of one region or another. The roots of the crisis lay in the inevitable collision of two mutually incompatible state and political conceptions.

*Tsar Symeon. Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

*Lead seal of tsar Symeon (893-927).*







*Anevo kale — ruins of a medieval fortress near Sopot, Ploudiv region.*

*Tsar Symeon seizes Edirne, miniature from a twelfth-thirteenth century transcription of John Scilitza's chronicle; now at the National Library in Madrid.*

The Byzantine one, ideologically based on the idea of Christian Universalism, maintained that the projection of God's Kingdom of Heaven on the earth should be a world empire, more specifically, the empire of Rome, as it unites under one sceptre all peoples on the earth practising the Christian faith in one language and sharing a uniform imperial culture, a uniform economy, one political organization and the same destiny. This conception denied the legitimate existence of all the other states in Europe which had been founded on the ruins of the Roman empire at the end of the antiquity. And, if Byzantium and the Holy Roman empire in Western Europe, with their politicians professing the same state ideology, had to come into contact with any of the existing European countries, this act was, as a rule, considered a tactical step aiming at earning time until the day, when the empire would have mastered enough strength to take them all in.

The Bulgarian state conception held that each people on the earth had the right to independent political, economic and cultural development. This ideology, which served as the basis of the modern European civilization, had been accepted only by the Bulgarian state of that time.

Until the Bulgarian conversion to Christianity, the instances of military confrontation between Bulgaria and Byzantium had invariably ended with the former's victory. Without any prospects for an imminent military success, Byzantium saw in the Christianization of Bulgaria a golden chance to turn the barbarian state formation first into its spiritual province and then, by using its heavens already introduced there — language, clergy, church institutions, etc. — to gradually decompose the Bulgarian state and social structures, and to Byzantinize, or render Byzantine, the obvious leaders of the people (the aristocracy, the clergy and the intelligentzia). In the long run, the plan was to annex the Bulgarian territory to the empire at







a time convenient, and ultimately, to do away with its independence.

Tsar Boris's political foresight, incredible for that time, helped him destroy one after the other the levers of the Byzantine mechanism employed to erode Bulgaria from within, which had seemed an inevitable consequence of its conversion to Christianity. The Greek language was banned and the Byzantine clergy expelled from the Bulgarian church and state. This was the last blow dealt by tsar Boris on the Byzantine penetration plan. Once again, the only way of stamping out Bulgaria — a dangerous example of national survival and resilience to the European political minds looking for alternatives to the existing political universalism, was to resort to the well-tried expedient of military confrontation.

Similar analysis had undoubtedly been made in the Bulgarian capital, too. With good reason, instead of taking adequate measures to retaliate the shift of the trade depot — this minor, though rancorous gesture on the part of Byzantium, then still unprepared for a military confrontation with Bulgaria, the fearless Bulgarian ruler preferred to settle the impending conflict on the battle field without delay.

In order to drive off the Bulgarian troops from the avenues of approach to Constantinople, Byzantium sent for the militant Magyars, then dwelling in the lands of the present-day steppes of the Russian Black Sea littoral. Their invincible cavalry raids were known to have passed like a dark cloud all over Europe from the Don to the Atlantic.

The Magyar incursion on the north Bulgarian lands forced Symeon to abandon Thrace and to hurry the better part of his army northwards. It did not succeed in winning the field and Symeon even had to encamp his troops behind the walls of the big Bulgarian forts along the bank of the Danube. The Magyars advanced on

*The northern gate of Great Preslav — capital city of the Second Bulgarian kingdom.*





*Decorative plaque with varying relief from Great Preslav.*

*Great Preslav — supporting wall on the eastern side of the Round church.*

*General view of the Round church at Great Preslav; tenth century.*



Preslav, the new Bulgarian capital, and besieged it.

The situation in Bulgaria was full of drama. With the Bulgarian elite troopers confined to the castles by the Danube, Preslav was left to the weak and unfit for action volunteer forces consisting of adolescents, old men and women. To the south, Byzantium was preparing an offensive by an enormous army that could hardly be stopped by the meagre Bulgarian troops left back in Thrace. The Bulgarian capital was obviously the target of a most ferocious warfare. The voluntary forces had hard times driving back a series of attacks on the fortress, with their strength wearing thin and their water and food supplies running low. The Magyars were preparing themselves for the zero-hour assault.

At this juncture, as reported by West European chroniclers, Boris I cast off his monastic cassock to head the troops. The appearance of the 90-year old man in full armour, flourishing a sword in front of the voluntary forces defending the capital, revived the general public enthusiasm which, at times, verged on religious ecstasy. The young saw him as a saintly man who had just come back to life (Boris was canonized after his death but to many he had been a saint while still living). The elderly perceived him as a relic of their heroic military past. So inspired, the volunteers did not even wait for the actual assault to start but left the capital walls into the fields encompassing them and threw themselves into a fight against the Magyars. The battle was ruthlessly fierce. The Magyar crack besiege army was destroyed to the last man. The siege of the Bulgarian capital was raised. Boris was still putting back on his monastic cassock when the Bulgarian crack regiments left the Danube fortifications and took the offensive. Having driven the remains of the Magyar troops out of Bulgaria, Symeon made his way into the territories occupied by the Magyars. The enraged Bulgarians destroyed everything that crossed their path. The Magyars were forced





to abandon for good the Black Sea littoral steppes and to settle in the heart of Europe, where they founded their own state.

Then tsar Symeon was off against Byzantium again. In a crucial battle which took place near Bulgarophigon, not far from Constantinople, the Byzantine army was utterly defeated. The Byzantines fled for their life to Constantinople which was immune against attack by land. Having no battle-fleet, Symeon directed his armies to the western part of the Balkan Peninsula. The Bulgarians occupied the territories of present-day Albania and Northern Greece. The peace treaty, signed in 904 AD, endorsed all territorial gains of Bulgaria. Weary Byzantium with its Asian territories suffering another Arab invasion, succumbed to the decision to cede to Bulgaria its role of a dominant power in the European East. Bulgaria's awe-stricken neighbours had to relinquish for long any plans for going counter Bulgaria. Peace enabled the Bulgarian people to

*Tsar Symeon defeating the Byzantine army at Bulgarophigon; miniature from the twelfth-thirteenth century manuscript of John Scilitza; now at the National Library in Madrid.*

*Carved decorative flagstones from Preslav; ninth-tenth century.*



direct its energies to impressive building and cultural activities.

Tsar Symeon was obviously well aware that as long as Byzantium existed, there would exist the universal state and the political idea denying the right to existence of the state he was ruling. Thus, his future foreign policy scheme included a plan to have the two states merge into one united Slavo-Byzantine empire with the Bulgarian ruler on the emperor's throne. His attempt to fulfil this plan by peaceful means, i.e., through a diplomatic matrimony in 912-914 AD, failed. Bulgaria and Byzantium found themselves involved in a vigorous conflict once again. The Bulgarians invaded on a large front and conquered most of the Byzantine domains in Europe.

The situation culminated in its outcome in August 917 AD. All Byzantine troops available were made into an army which set out towards Bulgaria. In the meantime, Byzantine diplomatic envoys busily engaged in organizing a strong anti-Bulgarian coalition,

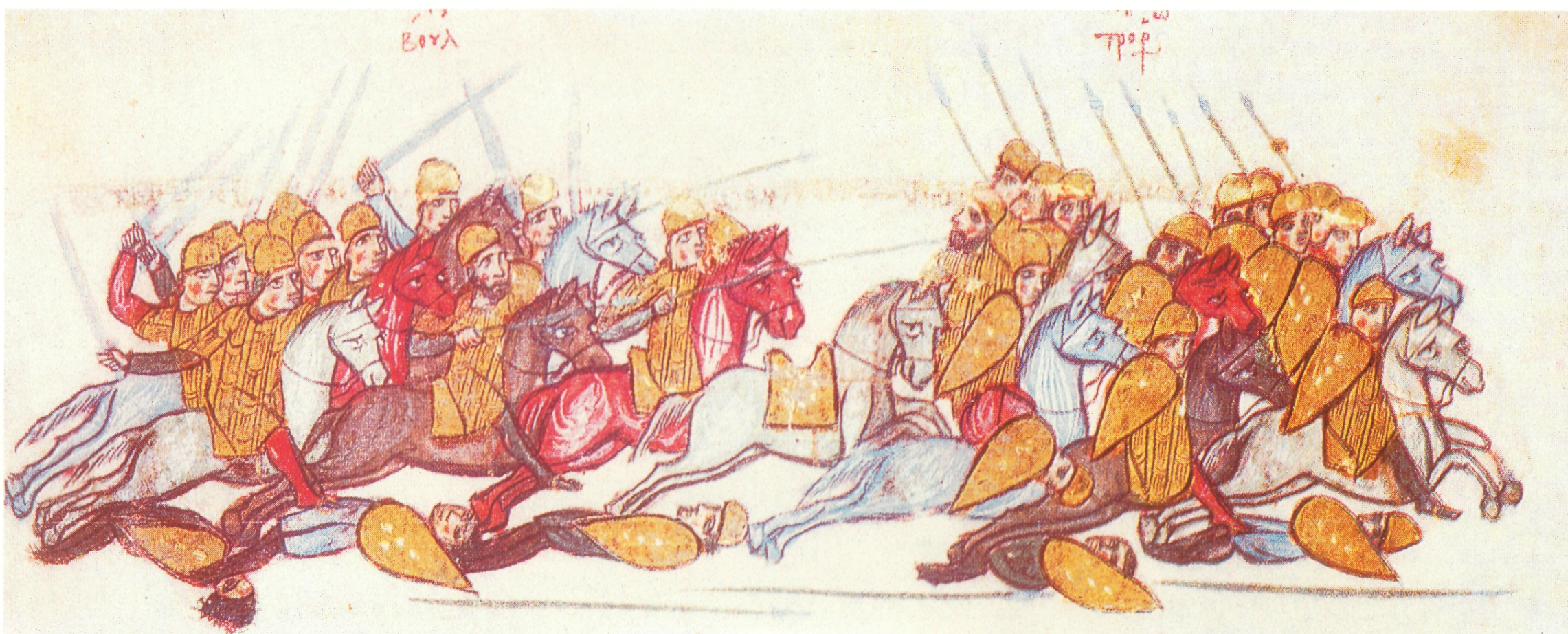




including Hungary, Serbia and the Pecheneg tribes from the steppes which had this time been persuaded to invade Bulgaria concomitantly with Byzantium.

Tsar Symeon also called his armies into a striking force and set out against his most dreaded foe — Byzantium. The armies met near the river of Acheloi, not far from the famous present-day Bulgarian resort the Sunny Beach. There, on 19 August 917 AD a battle, one of the biggest in human history, took place. The two sides sent a total of troops nearly 150 000-strong. The Bulgarian ruler, a recognized authority on ancient literature, resorted to a manoeuvre attributed to Hannibal in the battle at Cannae. The Byzantine army, similarly to the Roman army at Cannae, was surrounded near Acheloi and defeated to the last man. The battle was exceptionally furious, indeed. At one stage even the special regiment of the tsar's guards, led by Symeon himself, had to join in the fight. The Bulgar-

*Tsar Symeon defeating the Byzantine army at Acheloi (20 August 917); miniature from the twelfth-thirteenth century manuscript of John Scilitza; now at the National Library in Madrid.*



ian ruler was only slightly wounded, but lost his horse therein.

The anti-Bulgarian coalition disintegrated at the news of the decisive defeat of Byzantium. The Hungarians and the Pechenegs refused to invade the Bulgarian possessions. Serbia was crushed by the Bulgarian troops and its territory annexed to Bulgaria.

After the battle at Acheloi, tsar Symeon proclaimed the Bulgarian church a patriarchate and himself an emperor and autocrat of the Romans. He effectively possessed the power over the European Southeast with the exception of Constantinople, still remaining unconquered. All attempts of the Bulgarian ruler to take the capital of the Romans were in vain. On 27 May 927 AD, tsar Symeon the Great died of heart failure. His successor, tsar Peter signed a peace treaty with enervated Byzantium. By this act the empire recognized not only Bulgaria's territorial acquisitions but also the king's title of the Bulgarian ruler (equal to that of the emperor) and





the independence of the Bulgarian patriarchate. Thus, the two states enjoyed full parity in both state and political aspects. In its essence this meant abandonment of the idea of one unified state. The foreign political goals of Bulgaria and its ruler had been achieved although Byzantium continued to exist.

The time of tsar Symeon's rule was, without any doubt, a pinnacle in the Bulgarian political might and main in the European East. Its attainment had naturally and to a large extent been in the making of a pleiad of Bulgarian politicians who were capable of ruling Bulgaria well from the beginning of the 9th century up till the start of tsar Symeon's rule. The obvious merits of the Bulgarian ruler, however, should not be neglected. He was unusually talented a politician, a warrior and a man of letters. Tsar Symeon's versatile activities set an example which was followed not only by the Bulgarian but also by other Slav rulers and politicians between the 10th and the 14th centuries. The value of his deeds was stressed by all medieval researchers who had studied those times in their work. Perhaps the most precise of all assessments was the one made by the famous French historian Alfred Rambaud who wrote: 'King Symeon was the Bulgarian Charlemagne, but he was better educated than our Charles the Great and much greater than him for, he laid down the foundations of literature that belonged to the people'.

Tsar Symeon the Great was succeeded by his second son, tsar Peter (927-968). His 42-year long rule is the longest one-man reign ever in Bulgarian history. Forty of those years had passed in undisturbed peace and quiet with all neighbours. With the exception of the Serbian lands dropping out (that seems to have happened with the approval of Preslav), Bulgaria had not lost a single square metre of its territory. An experienced diplomat, tsar Peter deftly avoided the ripening confrontations with the Russians, the Magyars and the

*Tsar Symeon, the embodiment of the Golden Age of Bulgarian Literature. Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

*Lead seal of tsar Symeon; tenth century.*

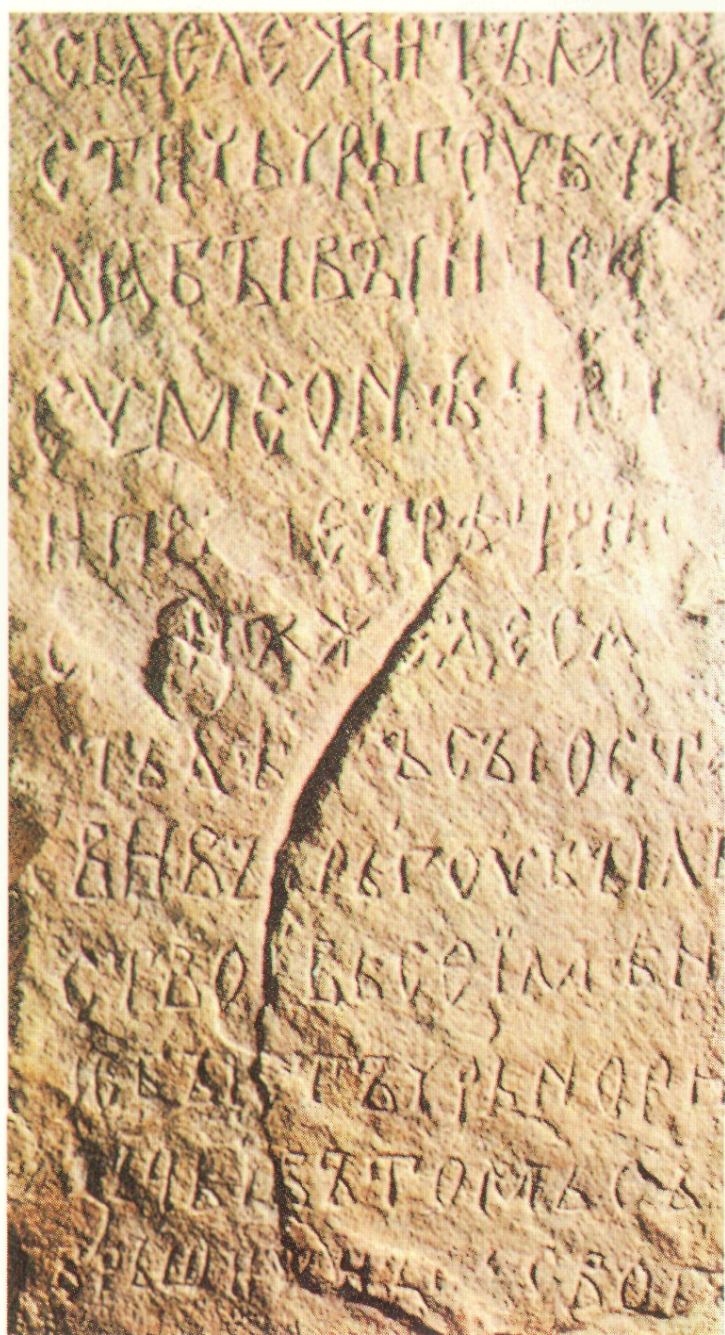






*Lead seal of tsar Peter; tenth century.*

*Tenth century tombstone of Mostich, state official from Preslav. It bears an important early Cyrillic inscription the gist of which is: 'Buried here is Mostich, churgoboilya (an officer in charge of state security) in the reign of tsar Symeon and then of tsar Peter. On the eighth of the tens of his years he retired to become chernorizets (a monk) and thus dispensed with his possessions until his labours were over'.*



Byzantines, sometimes turning the one enemy against the other.

Those forty peaceful years were, beyond doubt, extremely important for the recoupment of the demographic and economic losses of Symeon's wars. The lasting peace helped finalize without cataclysms the process of consolidating further the united Bulgarian nation, strengthening the position of Christianity, disseminating once and for all, the Old Bulgarian alphabet and literature and establishing firmly Christian state and religious structures.

This merit of tsar Peter's rule had been noted as early as the Middle Ages. Besides his admission to the Bulgarian church canon of saints, some folk chronicles containing idealistic accounts of his reign, can be used as sources of information about his vast popularity. It is of some interest to be known that the leaders of all Bulgarian uprisings at the time of the Byzantine domination over the Bulgarian lands during the 11th-12th centuries were named Peter upon their ascension to the throne, regardless of their real name by birth. This was obviously done in order to draw wider strata of the population into the movement for the Bulgarian liberation cause.

Negative trends could be noticed quite distinctly in the development of Bulgaria during the last few years of tsar Peter's reign. The process of feudalization had drawn a clear demarcating line between the secular and the religious ruling crust on the one side, and the exploited rural population burdened by ever-growing taxes and obligational duties, on the other. The social contradictions were inevitably intensified by the oncoming depravity and corruption among top state officialdom and clergy. Perhaps the negative phenomena were also a typical consequence of all gerontocracy-stricken totalitarian societies and of their adverse effect on the social life as a whole. During the last years of his rule tsar Peter was clearly a weakling.

The clash between the ruling class and the oppressed part of the society manifested itself in the way which was typical for the Middle Ages. In the middle of the 10th century the teaching of a lower clergyman, Bogomil the Priest, began to spread like an avalanche all over Bulgaria. It was called Bogomilism after the name of its originator.

Bogomilism had its ideological roots in the system of views of two earlier heretic philosophies which had penetrated Bulgaria via Byzantium — those of the Paulicians and the Manichaeans. The Bogomils preached faith in the existence and operation of two forces — the Good (embodied in God) and the Evil (embodied in the Devil). The whole visible or material world and man were a creation of Satan, while the human soul was a creation of God. It was quite clear that such a philosophy would rate the state and the official church, together with their institutions and servants, as well as all



structures of the society — the legislature and the like, as the work of Satan. Furthermore, since the Bogomils held that there was war between Good and Evil and that this war would inevitably end with the victory of the Good, they sounded the reveille for struggle against the whole of the existing socio-political establishment. The aggressiveness of this heresy could not but frighten both the state and the official church authorities. Anti-Bogomil struggle was waged to which the heretics responded by concealing their organisations.

Bogomilism crossed the Bulgarian borders and in the next few centuries enjoyed large-scale diffusion in the Balkan countries, Russia and Western Europe. In Italy the Bogomil offshoots were known as Cathars and in France, as Bougreans or Albigensians. The Bogomil organizations (communities or lodges) throughout Europe kept in close contact with each other. They exchanged people and literature and, in all spiritual affairs, recognized the supremacy of the main fraternity back in Bulgaria.

Bogomilism was undoubtedly a clear expression of the vehement social protest against the feudal oppression. In this context, it can be viewed as an interesting phenomenon on the Bulgarian social and political scene in the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, it will be an overstatement if this heresy is adorned with attributes like 'social' and 'revolutionary', or is declared an early portent of the Reformation movement in Europe. It is all too obvious that its philosophy was lacking in progressive alternatives and some of its conceptions were demonstratively reactionary, even anti-humanist. This second point can be illustrated by only two of the postulates in the rigorous ethic of the Bogomils, prescribing for the babies and young children to be subjected to maltreatment because they are His Satanic Majesty's spawn and for the adepts and, possibly, all disciples to give a wide berth to matrimony and to celibate instead.

The interests of any nation are fully incompatible with any ambition aimed at undermining and demolishing its state. This is particularly relevant to that remote epoch in which the state was the only surety for the nation's survival, existence and development. Therefore, it is not fortuitous that the initial enthusiasm with which the Bulgarians met Bogomilism and then helped disseminate it in Bulgaria, had been replaced by only limited interest on the part of both the white and the black lower clergy. Evidently the Bulgarian, mundane and practical as he had always been, utterly rejected the idea that, for the sake of saving his soul, he ought to stop making love to the wife he loved or to begin maltreating the children he adored.



*Anathemas for Bogomils and eulogies for kings excerpted from the Synodic of tsar Boril (Drinov's transcription), now at the St st Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia.*







## BULGARIAN EPIC ENDEAVOURS FOR INDEPENDENCE 968-1018

At long last, approaching danger sobered up some of the political circles in the Bulgarian capital. In 965 AD agreements of alliance with the Hungarians and the German emperor Otho I were concluded. These put an end to the country's foreign political immobilism and self-isolation from active international life.

Crisis in the Bulgarian state was gaining momentum and this, by some tragic coincidence, concurred with a continued period of stabilization for the Byzantine empire. By the end of the 60s it had beaten off the Arab aggression and was able to converge all its might against Bulgaria. In the beginning of 966 AD emperor Nicephorus II Phocas undertook a campaign against Bulgaria, but the imperial troops refused to cross the border for, the memory of the Bulgarian landslide victories in the past was still fresh. This, though, did not make Byzantium give up its plan of military confrontation, but this time it had decided to make a cat's paw of other forces. In 968 AD Svyatoslav, the prince of Kiev, was hired for enormous sums of money to raid the northeastern Bulgarian lands with an army 60 000-strong. At the cost of great effort and losses he cut it really fine to change the course of the battle in favour of the Russians and, eventually, routed the 30 000-strong Bulgarian troops, occupied the castle of Preslavets (Little Preslav) and decided to found his own state in the newly seized north Bulgarian lands.

Scared by the loss of the northern territories, the Bulgarian palace aristocracy overthrew incapacitated tsar Peter, sent him to a monastery and gave the throne to his son Boris II. Possessing

*View from the central part of the Balkan Range in the vicinity of Sopot, Ploudiv region.*

*Svyatoslav, prince of Kiev entering Bulgaria in 969 AD, miniature from the Bulgarian recension of Manasses chronicle of the fourteenth century; now at the Apostolic Library, Vatican.*

*A saint's head — icon hewn from stone; Preslav; ninth-tenth century.*







*Lead seal of tsar Peter; tenth century.*

none of his great grandfather's makings the new Bulgarian tsar failed to lean on and to organize the powerful potential of the Bulgarian people in the struggle against the Russian aggression, and entered into an alliance with Bulgaria's sworn enemy, Byzantium, instead. The latter did not naturally send him any reinforcements during the subsequent Russian aggression in 969 AD. The Russians again, conquered and besieged the capital city of Great Preslav. Instead of continuing the war with the Russians (three quarters of the Bulgarian territory were still free with all military potential intact), Boris II concluded an anti-Byzantine treaty with Svyatoslav and made him a commander-in-chief of the joint Russo-Bulgarian troops. The power of Boris II was formal — the uneducated Russian prince had the whole of the country in his full disposition.

In the summer of 970 AD Svyatoslav got into the saddle and, at the head of a huge army of Russians, Bulgarians, Pechenegs and Hungarians invaded Byzantium. It was his dream to found upon the ruins of Bulgaria and Byzantium an enormous barbarian state, stretching from Kiev to Constantinople. The military commanding abilities of the barbarian were not consistent with his ambitions. The united troops were beaten by the Byzantines who, in 971 AD took the offensive and, after fierce fighting, seized the Bulgarian capital of Preslav. Svyatoslav was driven out of the Balkans. On his way back to Kiev he was ambushed and slain by the Pechenegs.

The prince's death coincided with the end of the independence of Bulgaria, at least in terms of the medieval practices. The capital was in Byzantine hands and the tsar captured and stripped of the insignia of royalty at an official ceremony in Constantinople. Exhausted by the battles, the Byzantine troops returned to their capital without formally establishing the emperor's power in the western lands of Bulgaria. These were expected, without hindrance, to be annexed to and ruled by the sceptre of Rome Reborn.

The district governors in western Bulgaria, however, refused to submit to Constantinople. Samuel, the governor of Sredets (modern Sofia) raised the standard of revolt against Byzantium. An efficient leader and a superb commander Samuel struck heavy blows on the Byzantine troops and was successful in freeing in 976 AD the occupied territories. Byzantium, as could be expected, was irreconcilable. A cruel war of attrition, a war to the knife, broke out and neither of the belligerents was ready to succumb.

In 978 AD tsar Boris II somehow managed to escape from captivity. With his brother Romanus he made his way to the Bulgarian border but was accidentally shot dead by a Bulgarian sentry. Romanus could not ascend to the throne as he had been castrated by the Byzantines and thus, doomed to leave no issue. This and other accidents left Samuel unrivalled contender for the throne and he became tsar of the new Bulgarian empire (978-1014).

*Tsar Samuel's Castle at Ohrida; tenth century.*







In 986 AD the Byzantine emperor Basil II undertook a build-up campaign against Sredets with all Byzantine armies converging on it. The chief Bulgarian troops were decoyed far into the south, in the vicinity of Thessalonica. However, Sredets stood a several-week state of siege. At the news of the Bulgarian troops approaching Sredets (Samuel had already brought his troops back from Thessalonica at the price of unbelievably tough daily marches), Basil II made haste on a return march. On 17 August 986 AD he encountered Samuel at the Traianus Gateway on the trans-European route to Asia. There, on that day, the Bulgarian army gained one of its most brilliant victories in all history. The Byzantine troops suffered utter defeat. Escorted by a small contingent the emperor had a miraculously narrow escape through a passage left unprotected for reasons unknown.

Thereafter, until the beginning of the second millennium AD,

*John Tzimiskes's campaign against Great Preslav (971); miniature from the Bulgarian recension of the chronicle of Manasses; fourteenth century; now the Apostolic Library in Vatican.*



the Bulgarians had been unrivalled masters of the Balkans. The Bulgarian armies struck severe blows on Byzantium in Thrace, Beotia, Thessaly, Attica and the Peloponnese. Byzantium's allies, the Serbian principalities, were swept away and so were the Hungarians. Tsar Symeon the Great's once advanced main policy of no compromise against Byzantium seemed to have come to life again.

During the first years of the second millennium AD Byzantium restored the balance of power. The Bulgarian blow was followed by severe counter-blows. The alliance with Hungary ensured for Byzantium the division of the Bulgarian territory into two parts bridged by no obvious connection. The eastern part was soon subjected to Byzantine rule. Even so, the fighting in the western Bulgarian territories continued.

This situation drew to an end in 1014. In a battle near the village of Klyuch, Basil II captured the Bulgarian army 15 000-

*Markovo kale — medieval fortress at the Traianus Gateway which had seen Celts, Goths, Huns, Slavs, Bulgarians and Magyars at the time of their invading Thrace in the middle of the tenth century, as well as the knights of the First (1096), the Second (1147) and the Third (1183) crusades.*







*The fortress at the village of Klyuch. Its vicinity was the theatre of dramatic hostilities between the Bulgarian and the Byzantine armies in 1014.*



*Samuel's inscription, 993 AD; National Archeological Museum in Sofia.*

strong. Having spurred inadvertently his corps d'elite through to the important fortress of Strumitsa, he was defeated at its walls by the regiment of Gavrail Radomir, heir to the Bulgarian throne. Forced to withdraw and thus, venomed to the utmost limit, Basil II ordered for the 15 000 Bulgarian warriors taken prisoner after the previous battle, to be blinded and sent back to Samuel. At the terrible sight of his blind warriors' procession the Bulgarian tsar had a heart attack and died, winning a moral victory over his ruthless foe.

Tsar Samuel's death marked the beginning of the end. Feuds started flaring up in the Bulgarian aristocracy circles. The new Bulgarian tsar Gavrail Radomir (1014-1015) was murdered by his cousin Ivan Vladislav (1015-1018) who genuinely made serious efforts to save the country. At that time, though, geographically the strength of Bulgaria lay in its only surviving territory — the region of Macedonia. In a recklessly desperate attempt to keep it and, obviously wanting to leave a memorable legacy to posterity, the Bulgarian tsar threw himself to the front lines. He perished in a fierce man-to-man fighting for the Adriatic town of Dyrrachium. In the spring of 1018, the Byzantine troops made a ceremonial entry into the then Bulgarian capital, Ohrida. Some Bulgarian forts did not give up resistance up till the winter of 1019.

The death duellum of independent Bulgaria, which had gone on for nearly half a century, was brought to an end. The two sides involved in it, Bulgaria and Byzantium, overtaxed their potentialities to the utmost limit. Strongly impressed leading French medievalist Leon Gustave Schlumberger called it 'Byzantine epic'. Other European historians had no lesser reasons to call it 'Bulgarian epic'. For, in that fight Bulgaria and the Bulgarian people defended their state independence, not some abstract idea for a world-embracing empire.







## THE BULGARIAN LANDS UNDER BYZANTINE RULE (1018-1185)

The subjection of Bulgaria to direct Byzantine rule had, undoubtedly, grave consequences for the Bulgarian people. It had been deprived of opportunities to manifest itself as one of the nations in human history and its line of independent political, cultural and economic development had been interrupted.

It must be conceded that the Byzantine emperor issued an order that the tax system of the Old Bulgarian kingdom continue to be applied in the occupied Bulgarian lands. It was, undeniably, much fairer than its Byzantine analogue. The Bulgarian patriarchate was downgraded to an archbishopric. Called Ohridska, meaning 'of or belonging to Ohrida', it retained its autocephalous status. Hundreds of Bulgarian aristocracy retained their position of landlords in their feudal possessions. Moreover, the better part of the Bulgarian lands, comprising mainly the lands of Macedonia, was joined in administrative districts called 'Bulgaria themes'. Troops were recruited mainly from the Bulgarian population.

Only ten years later the Byzantine tax system was introduced into the Bulgarian lands, too. Strangers were appointed incumbents of the Ohrida archbishopric. The Bulgarian literacy, liturgy and traditions were subjected to ruthless persecution. The greed and selfishness of the Byzantine officials, commissioned to work in the Bulgarian lands, gradually ruined the local economy. To most of them the years of service there meant no more than a golden opportunity to make a fortune.

The Bulgarian aristocracy had slowly but consistently been removed from its lands. Many of them were sent on 'assignments' in other realms of the empire remote enough from the Balkans, while others were bribed to pass over to the Byzantines.

This situation gave rise to discontent among all Bulgarian population strata. Mass rebellions aimed at restoring the Bulgarian state broke out. The first one rose in Belgrade (present-day capital of Serbia) in 1040. It was headed by Peter Delyan, grandson of glorious tsar Samuel and it ended with his being proclaimed a Bulgarian tsar. Peter Delyan reigned for two years (1040-1041) and succeeded in liberating a great part of the Bulgarian lands. The insurrection collapsed quickly when the tsar was treacherously blinded by one of his relatives aspiring to the Bulgarian throne.

Another massive insurgence broke out in 1072. Its standard was raised by Georgi Voiteh in the town of Skopje (present-day capital of Macedonia). It took two years of fighting before it was

*Assenova krepost (Assen's castle) — medieval fortified settlement, stretching over an area of 15 decares (1.5 ha); eleventh-fourteenth century; Assenovgrad, Plovdiv region.*

*St Nahum church at Ohrida.*





crushed. In 1074-1078 and in 1084-1086 fresh revolts broke out in the areas of modern Silistra, Plovdiv and Nessebur. These were also put down by the Byzantine authorities.

At the end of the 11th century the Byzantine domains in the Balkans which, for nearly a century, had comprised chiefly Bulgarian lands, became the arena of fierce hostilities: the Normans invading from the south and the knights of the First (1096-1097) and then the Second (1146-1147) crusade advancing along the trans-European route with swords drawn and fire blazing. Most frightful of all, however, were the renewed raids of the barbarians from the steppes, raids unseen in those lands since the 7th century. In times gone the Bulgarian state had reliably safeguarded not only Byzantium but also the whole of Europe against the raids of bellicose Nomads. The now emasculate Byzantine imperium was no longer in the position to effectively defend the territory of the empire, so

*Bird's-eye-view of the town of Nessebur  
— a UNESCO listed town.*





the burden of safeguarding the metropolitan mainstays fell on Bulgarian shoulders. During the 11th century all attempts at organizing a liberation movement had stopped. The Bulgarians were busy organizing their life-and-death struggle to keep body and soul together. At the cost of numerous lives lost they managed to restrict, within certain limits, the advance of the crusaders along their mapped-out routes and to crush or beat off the raids of the Uzes, the Pechenegs and the Cumans.

A paradoxical situation arose at the end of the 12th century. Formally Byzantium was the sovereign of the Bulgarian lands, but whole areas (Moesia, Dobrudja and Macedonia) the Byzantine power was nominal. There ruled representatives of the Bulgarian aristocracy — harsh warriors who had been through dozens of battles. The population, inured to the privations of war and inspired by spurious accounts, supported them. Some fabulous chronicles

*Remains of fortress walls at Nessebur.*

*St. John the Baptist church at Nessebur; tenth century.*



told of how intelligent patriots wistfully imagined the Bulgarian kingdom by idealistically representing it as a piece of Eden.

The insurgent sea of patriotism pervades some of the political pamphlets which have come down to us, naturally in the form of religious prophecies. Their spirit is of Messianic nature as it is sustained in them that out of the three kingdoms in the world — the Alemanic (German), the Roman (Byzantine) and the Bulgarian, the first two would go to rack and ruin as they had departed from Christian canons and had lapsed into depravity. Resurrection and eternal life were awaiting the Bulgarian kingdom which would have the mission to redeem and, then, render imperishable the values of the Christian civilization.

In this atmosphere, at the end of the 12th century just a spark was needed to flare up a fresh liberation uprising.







## RESTORATION AND RISE OF THE BULGARIAN STATE AND ITS HEGEMONY ON THE BALKAN PENINSULA 1185-1246

The spark that kindled the Bulgarian liberation insurrection in the spring of 1185 was the heavy special taxes imposed in the Bulgarian lands with a view to meeting the exorbitant expenses on the occasion of the Byzantine emperor's dynastic marriage with the juvenile Hungarian princess. Sporadic, not well-planned riots broke out in the southern Bulgarian Black Sea littoral, the Balkan Range area and in Macedonia. Engaged in severe battles with the Normans, Byzantium failed to suppress these riots on time. This made the rebels even more audacious. The sources shedding light on these events are rather scanty, but there is some secondary evidence that the idea to restore the Bulgarian state had quickly pushed to the background the initial economic motives of the unrests. There was a provision in the Bulgarian law that the Bulgarian throne should be ascended only by persons of royal descent. This must have made riot leaders approach two remote descendants of the Symeon dynasty, the brothers Assen and Theodor — military and administrative governors of a region in Moesia at the time. The brothers, however, were hesitant in responding to the rebels' ideas. The military confrontation with the still mighty empire kept everyone alert. Thus, they tried to achieve the goals of the movement by peaceful means. Assen and Theodor were sent to see the emperor at his military camp on the Aegian coast. They asked to be appointed military and administrative governors of all Bulgarian lands which would probably give them a certain taste of autonomy within the empire. The emperor's consent would have committed them to incorporating the rebels' combat forces into the emperor's army, then at war with the Normans.

One could hardly think of a better proposal which would so well come up to the interests and save the reputation of both parties to the conflict. It is known, though, that wisdom and sagacity are qualities not often inherent to politicians. In that case, too, the emperor not only rejected the idea but also literally slapped Assen in the face. The Bulgarians returned to their fortifications in the mountains which, according to a Byzantine chronicler, had busily been renewed and reinforced.

It seems, however, that a large proportion of the Bulgarian people was still reluctant to tread the path of open confrontation with the imperium. On that account, the two brothers did something which may look strange by today's standards but was fully justified by the spirit of that epoch. At the time of the Norman sei-

*Bird's-eye-view of Turnovo — the capital city of the Second Bulgarian kingdom.*

*Turnovo — part of the fortress walls and the royal chapel (restored) on Tsarevets acropolis.*







*Medallion showing a lion; uncovered on Tsarevets acropolis in Turnovo; now at the National Archeological Museum in Sofia.*

*The brothers Peter and Assen rising a rebellion in Turnovo. Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

zure of Thessalonica (1185), a group of Bulgarians managed to salvage and transfer to the Balkan mountain fort of Turnovo the icon of St. Demetrius — the most worshiped military patron in Byzantium. Assen and Theodor erected a church in Turnovo, accommodated the icon in there and, during the official inauguration in November 1186, announced that St. Demetrius had turned his eyes away from Byzantium and would thereafter be the patron of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian army. Grippled by a flush of inspiration a multitude of warriors immediately proclaimed Theodor a tsar of Bulgaria. As such he goes by the name of Peter. Assen assumed the command of the Bulgarian armies. Then the Bulgarian contingents left Turnovo and rode swiftly to the old Bulgarian capital of Preslav where tsar Peter had remained. Assen stayed back in Turnovgrad to govern his and his brother's patrimonium there.

Turnovo was soon to assume the functions of a capital city, for the real power was in the hands of Assen. He was, incidentally, also given the title of tsar of Bulgaria in 1187.

During the first year of the rebellion only the regions of Moesia and Wallachia had their independence from Byzantium restored. In the subsequent year, however, the armies of the Bulgarians made an entry into the formerly Bulgarian southern territories. And, while Macedonia — the kernel of the Bulgarian resistance against the Byzantine aggression in the 10th and the 11th centuries, was freed without any particular difficulty, battles waged in Thrace could be compared, by scope and severity, only with those at the time of the so-called Bulgarian epic. There followed about a ten-year period of alternating twists: at times the Bulgarian troops reached the neighbourhood of Constantinople and Thessalonica — the two main cities of the empire and, at times, the Byzantines led battles in Moesia. At one stage the Bulgarians had just gained superiority in the fighting when the seeds of discord yielded their fruit that fell among the





*Krivus — medieval fortress in the Arda river valley.*

*Perperek — medieval fortress at the village of Gorna krepost, Kurdjali region.*

*Gold signet ring of tsar Kaloyan; twelfth century.*



Bulgarian palace aristocracy. In 1196, tsar Assen I (1187-1196), a victim of a plot, was murdered. Shortly after, his brother tsar Peter (1189-1197) suffered a similar fate. The conspirers did not succeed in consolidating their power.

The two assassinated royal brothers — liberators of Bulgaria, had a third brother who ascended the Bulgarian throne as tsar Kaloyan (1197-1207). Having suppressed the strong *boyar* opposition, the young Bulgarian ruler declared war on Byzantium in 1199. By 1202 he succeeded in liberating the parts of Thrace, Macedonia and the Black Sea littoral still under Byzantine rule. This time Byzantium's attempts to repeat its 9th-11th century experience of using the Hungarians against the Bulgarians, failed. In 1203 the Hungarian imperial troops were defeated and some parts of the central Danubian tableland, which had been taken away from the Bulgarians during their agony at the beginning of the 11th century, were restituted to the Bulgarian state.

Meanwhile tsar Kaloyan was well-aware of his country's serious international isolation. A conflict with the Latins interpolated into the conflict with Byzantium which had permanently been seething with the help of the Hungarians, always at hand for a revenge. For this reason, as early as 1199, he wrote to Pope Innocent III to propose subordination of the Bulgarian church in return for his being crowned as a sign of the legitimacy of his reign. The negotiations, conducted with perfect diplomatic skill by both parties, ended in 1204. Tsar Kaloyan received from Rome a crown, a sceptre and a blessing for his title as a king while the Bulgarian archbishop Basil was consecrated as primate of the Bulgarian church. This act enabled tsar Kaloyan to declare illegal all Hungarian revenge-seeking intentions with respect to Bulgaria, already a fully fledged Catholic country and even, with the Pope's blessing, to strike a preventive stunning blow on the Hungarians in Transilvania and Serbia.





*Monyak — medieval fortress at the village of Shesta krepost, Kurdjali region. The brother of Henry VI, emperor of the Latins, had spent the night there at the time of his abortive campaigns against tsar Kaloyan.*

At that juncture, in 1204 Bulgaria's perennial enemy — the Byzantine empire, unexpectedly collapsed. Debilitated by the 20-year long hostilities with the Bulgarians, it yielded to the pressure of and eventually fell to the crusaders in the Fourth crusade. The foundations of the political prodigy of Western Europe, the Latin empire, were laid in conquered Constantinople. The new state quickly got down to occupying almost all Byzantine territories in Europe and Asia Minor.

Tsar Kaloyan was anxious to negotiate a settlement of the borderline dispute with the Latin emperor Baldwin of Flanders (1204-1205). However, the Latins' reply was haughty and rude. They said that, as far as they were concerned, Bulgaria was an illegitimate political formation and that its territory, as part of the former Byzantine empire whose heirs-at-law they thought to be, would belong to them by rights. They informed Kaloyan in a sarcastic fashion that their coming was imminent. Kaloyan's plea to Pope Innocent III to bring the crusaders to their senses took no effect at all.

In that situation the Bulgarian ruler, who surely did not like being at the tail-end of events, decided to strike first. In the spring of 1205 a rebellion, inspired by tsar Kaloyan, broke out in Latin Thrace. Only when the Latin army besieged the main city of the region, Adrianople (present-day Edirne), did the crusaders see, in spell-binding amazement, that the fortress walls had Bulgarian standards fixed on top. Surviving Byzantine nobility had to recognize the supremacy of the Bulgarian tsar. Soon after, the Bulgarian army also arrived at the walls of Adrianople. Confident of their invincibility, the knights raided the Bulgarian army on 14 April 1205 and sustained tremendous losses and a defeat. On that day, in the vicinity of Adrianople, emperor Baldwin was taken prisoner and the 'cream of Western knighthood' slain, as some Western chroniclers had vividly described the event. This was not all that happened on



that day. It marked the end of the reveries of some West European political circles about their enduring presence in the East. For, the Adrianople disaster was a death blow to the infant empire which did, never again, succeed in assuming the role of a primary political power in the European East and which, after a painful agony six decades long, was to disappear completely from the political stage.

During the couple of years that followed, the Bulgarian contingents struck fresh and severe blows on the crusaders. The last of the Fourth crusade leaders, Boniface of Montferrat, 'king' of Thessalonica, got slain in a battle with the Bulgarians. The Byzantine aristocracy, confused by and frightened of Bulgaria's triumphant marches which had already pushed it forward again as a predominant power in the Balkans, backed out of its alliance with the Bulgarians, and, as a result, was completely done away with in Thrace. A legend was circulated among the few survivors in which Kaloyan was seen as the Providence itself retaliating the evil caused to the Bulgarians in the beginning of the 11th century.

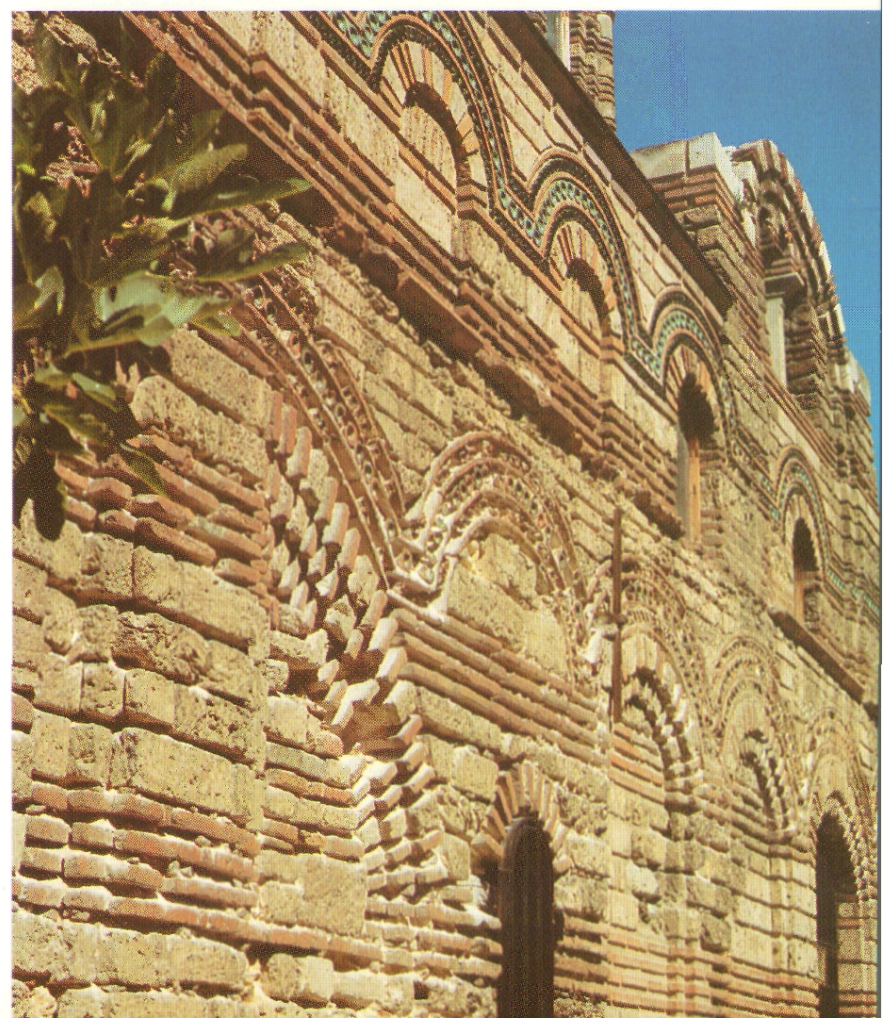
In October 1207 tsar Kaloyan besieged Thessalonica. On the eve of the battle, the Bulgarian tsar died in circumstances which are rather vaguely described in the various sources. According to some he had died of heart failure and, according to others, he had been ambushed and murdered. Boril, Kaloyan's nephew and the only adult descendant of Assen's House, was set on the throne.

Tsar Boril (1207-1218) possessed none of the diplomatic or military abilities of the three royal brothers. A number of discontented *boyars* — regional governors in Macedonia, Thrace and the Rhodopes refused to obey the central power and set up autonomous feudal possessions. The exhausted Bulgarian state could not counteract a Latin raid in 1208 and lost Thrace. The Hungarians were also on the offensive from the west. As late as 1214 Boril succeeded in defeating the invaders. The hostilities with the Latins and the Hungarians were discontinued by the intercession of the Pope, while peace was being consolidated by dynastic marriages. Opposition against Boril was gaining momentum which was due to the tsar's political and military ineptitude, as well as to his suspected complicity in the plot that had resulted in tsar Kaloyan's death.

In 1217 the legitimate heir to the Bulgarian throne — the son of tsar Assen I, by name Ivan Assen II, returned from exile in the Russian principality of Galich where he had been sent as a juvenile at the time of Boril's ascension to the throne. Now Ivan Assen was at the head of a company of Russian mercenaries. One after the other the fortresses opened their gates to him. Boril shut himself up in the capital city of Turnovo which took until the spring of 1218 to fall. Boril was deposed and blinded, and Ivan Assen began his reign as a Bulgarian tsar.

The young sovereign differed from his predecessor in his ex-

*The eastern facade of St Pantocrator church at Nessebur; fourteenth century.*





traordinary statecraft skills. From the very beginning of his reign he had to cope with a rather complex foreign political situation. The bipolar pattern of political relations, i.e. Byzantium versus Bulgaria, which had been typical of the development of the European East for centuries on end, was substituted by a conglomerate of state formations with equal power and ambitions: the Latin empire, Byzantium's successors Epirus and Nicaea, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary. By choosing to negotiate (this approach was not common in medieval political affairs all that much), rather than to get bogged down in unrestrained military confrontation, tsar Ivan Assen II succeeded in attaining goals almost as high as those achieved by Symeon the Great and tsar Samuel. His diplomatic marriage with the daughter of the Hungarian king guaranteed the return of Belgrade and Branichevo — territories in the central Danubian tableland which had been detached from Bulgaria earlier on. Ivan Assen

*Two-storey domed church of the Petrich Virgin at Assenova krepost (Assen's castle); twelfth century.*







Gold coin of tsar Ivan Assen II (1218-1241); now at the National Archeological Museum in Sofia.

The cliff at Assenova krepost (Assen's castle) with an inscription on it, the gist of which is: 'In the year 6739 from the Creation (= 1231), Indiction 4, the man elevated by God, Ivan Assen II, tsar of the Bulgarians and the Greeks, as well as of the other states, installed as governor Alexis the Sevast (Sebastos) and fortified this castle.'



II also had the region of Upper Thrace returned under a Treaty of alliance with the Latin empire.

In 1230 Bulgaria was raided by the troops of the Epirus despotate. Its despot, Theodore Comnenus, who regarded himself a legitimate heir to the Byzantine emperor's throne, was defeated in a pitched battle near the village of Klokotnitsa and was taken prisoner. The Bulgarian state occupied all his realms and thus, once again, became an unrivalled power on the Balkans. Similar to the situation back in the 10th century, its territory comprised almost the whole of the Balkan Peninsula.

During the subsequent ten years of his rule, the Bulgarian tsar became famous for his expert manoeuvres among the rest of the political powers on the peninsula, not allowing even one of them to dispute Bulgaria's hegemony. The status quo was preserved until the tsar's death in 1241. Even in the last months of his life Ivan Assen II managed to demonstrate the potentialities of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian army crushed hordes of Tatars who had been invincible until that time. It is worth reminding that the Tatars, obsessed with the Asian mania for world hegemony, had already engulfed all state formations west of the Urals including Russia, had defeated and unmanned Hungary and were then heading towards Bulgaria in order to cover their flank — a prerequisite needed for their planned invasion of Western Europe. But in 1241 the Bulgarians routed the Tatars which took the edge off their intended aggression against Western Europe once and for all. They remained a major political power for long centuries ahead but their ambitions did, never again, stretch beyond the borders of Eastern Europe — the lands reached thusfar.

The territorial expansion of the Bulgarian state within the boundaries of the Bulgarian ethnos had created favourable conditions for its successful economic and cultural development. From that time on, the Bulgarian economy took an active part in the all-round exchanges with the economy of Western Europe. Ivan Assen II signed many agreements with European political formations which helped regulate their trade with the East. Fully restored in 1235, the Bulgarian patriarchate became the only institution of the Eastern Orthodox religion to be backed up by a well-established political power, bearing in mind the collapse of Byzantium and Russia as it really was at that time. Thus, it gained enormous authority with the whole of the East. The cultural exchanges initiated by the intellectual circles in the bosom of the Bulgarian church became an example to follow for the intellectuals of the East.







## POLITICAL CRISIS (1246-1300)

The span between 1185 and 1241 marked the notable rise of the Bulgarian state. At the end of this period it seemed the only formation in Eastern Europe capable of uniting its population both against the expansion of the Asian barbarians and the advance of the Catholic West. However, the rise days were over and a period of decline of no smaller proportion set in. After the death of Ivan Assen II the throne went twice to his juvenile sons — Kaloman (1241-1246) and Mikhail Assen (1246-1256). Court intrigues, plots, coups and counter-coups took hold of the country in the absence of a strong hand on the throne to rule it. The inept foreign policy of the regents led to serious territorial waste. The Bulgarian state was losing territories all over. After 1253 Mikhail Assen, no longer a child, made an attempt to restore the status quo. The young Bulgarian tsar was successful in the beginning, but in 1256 he was murdered in a court plot. The new Bulgarian tsar Constantine Tikh (1256-1277) did not manage to veer round. In 1263 his army was defeated by the army of the Byzantine empire which was back on its feet since 1261 and Bulgaria lost the southern Black Sea littoral. Now weaker, Bulgaria fell an easier prey to the Tatars who immediately resumed their vigorous raids against its surviving territories. Constantine Tikh was mentally broken by the defeats. He retired into himself behind the walls of Turnovo, leaving the country to the mercy of fate.

In that extremely critical situation the best features of the Bulgarian people became apparent. The commanders of the provin-

*Tsar Constantine Tikh-Assen (1257-1277) and his consort, tsaritsa Irina; fresco from the Boyana church near Sofia (1259).*

*Copper coin of the reign of tsar Constantine Tikh-Assen; now at the National Museum of History in Sofia.*

*Medieval fortress at Lovech.*





cial regiments applied relentless tactics and showed no mercy in organizing their own resistance against the barbarians who had, until that time, broken the backs of China, India, Russia, Hungary and Poland. All inhabitants of the country and the supplies of food and accoutrements were put up safe in the fortresses. The ravenous Tatars were not good at taking fortresses, so they lost many lives in attempting to get in there. In the dark of the night, the Bulgarians used to get out of the forts and slaughter hundreds of them prowling after food.

In 1277 a man, Ivailo by name, took the masterminding of the resistance against the Tatars in his hands. According to some sources he was a simple farmer, and according to others he was a *boyar* and keeper of the fortress of Ovech (present-day Provadia). Having gradually exhausted the Tatar armies, Ivailo had all regional military divisions join forces, and then carried out the decisive battle

*Bird's-eye view of Petrich kale — medieval fortress at Provadia, Varna region.*

*Road embedded in the cliffs of the medieval fortress of Petrich kale.*







against the trespassers. Soon they were defeated and driven out of the Bulgarian lands. Ivailo was crowned tsar but, only three years later, he was murdered in fresh internecine battle for the throne. George Terter was proclaimed tsar. Seven years later he was forced to submit to becoming a vassal of the Tatar khan. The latter did not venture to invade Bulgaria. The reign of the next tsar Smilets (1292-1298) was even more impersonal and humiliating. Upon his death, the Bulgarian throne went straight to Chaka, the son of Nogai — khan of the Mongol Golden horde. Yet, no Tatar troops dared step on Bulgarian land. Bulgaria was, all the same, at the nadir of its political decline.

*General view of Cherven — medieval fortress with a citadel at the village of Cherven, Russe region.*



ВЪВЪДЪ

ВЪДАВАВЪРЕНІЯ

КАТЪГАРѦМЪ

НАМЛОДРЪЖЕЦЪ

ИГРЪКОМЪ

ВЪМЪБЪГАРѦ

ИГРЪКОМЪ



ІОШНІМА

ЦРЬ СІЪ

ВЕЛИКАЦРЬІО

АЛЕ

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ІОАГЪ

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СІЪ

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## CONSOLIDATION OF THE MEDIEVAL BULGARIAN STATE 1300-1371

In the year 1300 Svetoslav Terter (1300-1322), the son of tsar George Terter, saw his chance in the rampant internecine conflict in the khanate of the Tatars, deposed the Tatar from the Bulgarian throne and proclaimed himself as a Bulgarian tsar. With a firm hand, the young and vigorous Bulgarian ruler put an end to the boyar ruinous skirmishes, eliminated through negotiations the Tatar threat, and started fighting for the recovery of the Bulgarian territories lost hitherto. After decades being on the defensive, the Bulgarian state was back on the offensive against Byzantium. As a result of a winning war between 1304-1308, the Bulgarians retrieved the southern Black Sea littoral and eastern Thrace. The Bulgarian foreign policy established fruitful political and economic contacts with Venice and Genoa. Its relations with all Balkan neighbours improved, too.

The measures to restore the Bulgarian state organism had yielded good results. It was comparatively easy for Bulgaria to overcome the dynasty crises of 1322 and 1330. Similar situations in the past had invariably led to lingering stagnation and to an ultimate headlong decline. In 1331 Ivan Alexander came to the throne and ruled Bulgaria for forty years, a political longevity unattained by any other sovereign of Bulgaria after the restoration of its independence in 1185.

At the very beginning of his reign, tsar Ivan Alexander struck with awe Byzantium — Bulgaria's eternal rival in the Balkans. Invading Byzantine troops were stopped and defeated in the vicinity

*Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) and his consort, tsaritsa Theodora with their sons Ivan Assen and Ivan Shishman; miniature from the Gospels of tsar Ivan Alexander (1356); now at the British Museum in London.*

*Fragment of a map of the Black Sea from the Atlas of Petrus Vesconte; now at the Apostolic Library in Vatican.*

*Silver coin from the reign of tsar Mikhail Shishman (1323-1330).*





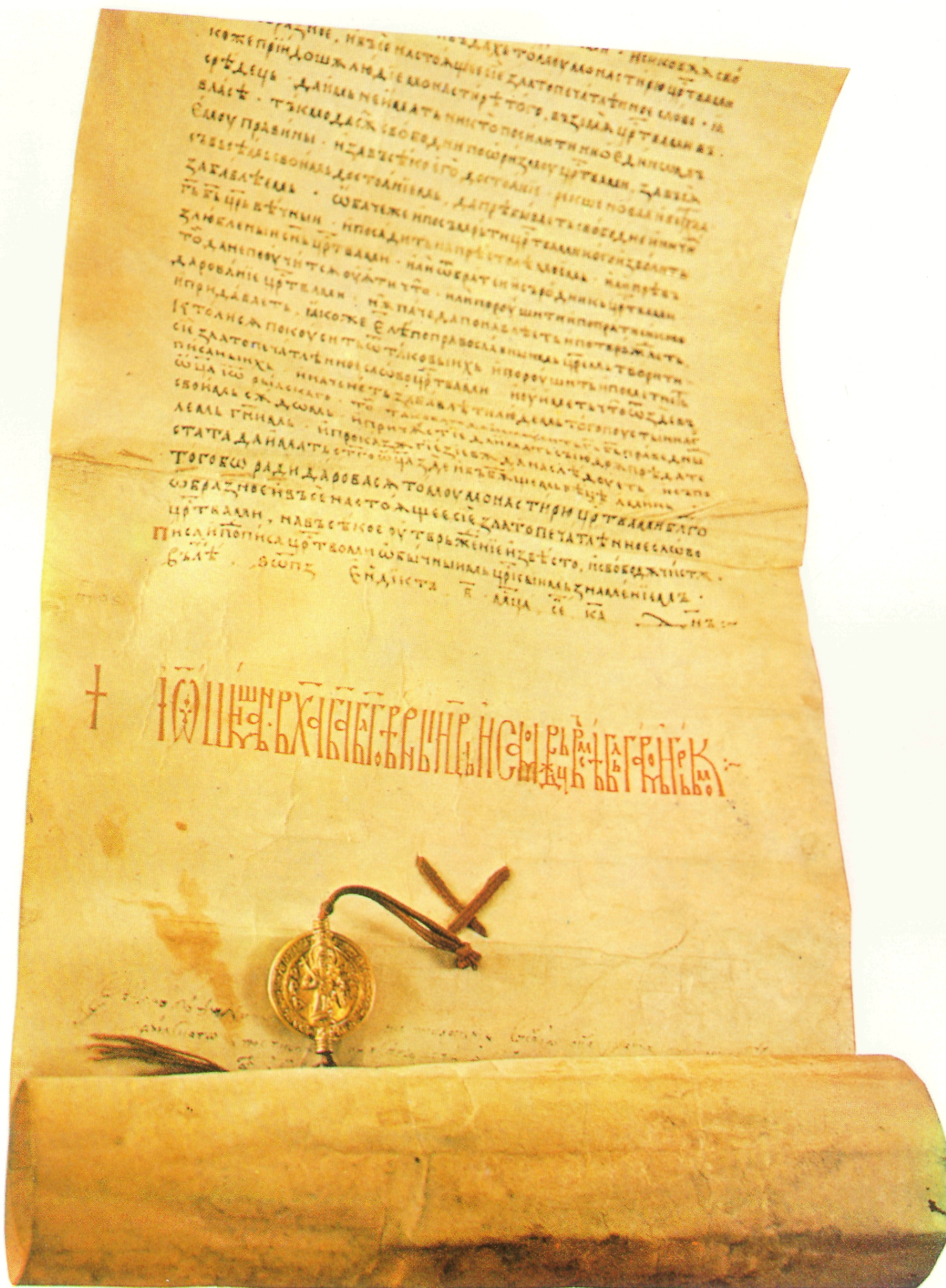
of Russocastro fortress, not far from the big modern Bulgarian port of Burgas. A long period of peace, confirmed by dynastic marriages set in. The relations with the new Balkan power, the kingdom of Serbia founded in the year 1300, were handled in the same pattern. Peace treaties covering the whole range of relations had also been signed with the Venetians and the Genoese.

The successful foreign policy of Bulgaria was no help in stopping the creeping feudal fragmentation of its territory. A number of local feudal governors in Macedonia, Thrace, Moesia and Dobrudja had gradually become independent landlords with purely formal connections with the central authorities in Turnovo. Tsar Ivan Alexander himself gave an example to this end. In 1356 he separated off Vidin from the Bulgarian monarchy and set up his son Ivan Sratsimir as a ruler there. Although the governors of the Bulgarian feudal possessions had never been in obvious conflict with the

*Despot Deyan with his wife, despotitsa Doya; mural from St John the Preacher Chapel at Zemen monastery; fourteenth century.*







monarch, their independent foreign policy was not always in line with the sovereign interests of the Bulgarian state, to say nothing of the numerous occasions of strife and collision between the various Bulgarian, Byzantine, Serbian, Wallach and Hungarian feudal possessions in the middle of the 14th century, which had largely contributed to the impermissible depletion of the demographic and economic potentialities of the Christian East.



*Encolpion cross; fourteenth century.*

*Honorary charter of tsar Ivan Shishman, 1378; National Museum of Rila monastery.*

*Silver coin showing tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371).*





ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

ΚΗΧΑΙΝΑΔΗ

ΓΥ.ΒΝΔ

ΣΗΣ ΚΕΦΑΝ

ΣΑΟΡ

ΕΙΣΤΟΓΑ

ΑΝΗΡ

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ΕΙΣΤΟΓΑ

ΕΙΣΤΟΓΑ



## THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST OF BULGARIA

In 1352 a detachment of Ottoman Turks sailed through Hellespont, now the Dardanelles — the strait separating Europe from Asia, and took Tsimpe, a small Byzantine fort. That is considered to have marked the beginning of the fresh offensive of Asiatic Islamism against the Christian civilization of Europe. The first two assaults at the beginning of the 8th century and at the turn of the 13th century were beaten off by the Christian political powers of the East — Bulgaria, Byzantium and Russia. The third storm, however, led to centuries long confrontation causing, at different times, utmost bracing of all European energies directed at checking the Muslim invasion. It was eventually stopped and fought back for ever no nearer than Vienna. This happened in 1683 and was drowned in seas of European blood. Bulgaria and all the other medieval Christian states in the Balkans were ruined in the twists of this dramatic clash between the European and the Asian civilizations during the 14th-15th centuries.

The reasons of the political downfall of the Christian South-east of Europe lay, first and foremost, in the extreme political particularism and lack of political trust among the Christian Balkan powers which prevented them from building up a strong perennial military and political alliance against the common enemy. The combat potentialities of the Bulgarian people alone, a people which at that time took up three quarters of the territory of the Balkan Peninsula, would have been sufficient to throw the Muslim invaders back to Asia. The Bulgarians failed to offer efficient resistance, be-

*Cliff carving from the Bozhenishki Ourvich fortress with Sevast Ognyan's text inscribed; the gist of the text is: 'I, Dragomir wrote and I, Sevast Ognian was a Kephale (governor) under tsar Shishman and saw a lot of trouble and pain. At that time the Turks were warring and I wanted to maintain tsar Shishman's faith'; fourteenth century.*

*Medieval fortress at the village of Sur-nak, Kurdjali region.*

*Ruins of the fortress wall at Sozopol.*







*Silver coin from the reign of tsar Ivan Shishman (1371-1395).*

*Direkliata — church hewn from the cliffs at the village of Osmar, Shumen region.*



cause of their being split into several state formations and their being frequently involved in intricate political chicanery both between themselves and with close and not so close Christian neighbours. It would be true to say the same about the rest of the Balkan countries — Serbia and Byzantium, which had been divided into several independent feudal possessions towards the middle of the 14th century.

A young and vigorous centralized Islamic monarchy, drawing on the resources of Asia's boundless womb and elated by the Islamic martial ideology — an ideology aspiring to fix the banner of Mohammed on all lands of the 'unfaithful' and to establish a world-embracing Islamic empire, was already confronting the disunited ranks of Bulgaria and the other Balkan feudal states.

The agony of the medieval Bulgarian state began only 12 years after the Turks' coming to Europe. In 1364 they invaded Bulgaria and took Central Thrace with the important towns of Borouy or Berrhoea (today's Stara Zagora) and Plovdiv. The attempted counter-offensive organized by two Bulgarian feudals from the region of Macedonia in 1371, resulted in the tragic battle at Chernomen (near Edirne). There the united Christian army of Serbs and Bulgarians, coming from various feudal possessions in the Balkans, was defeated. The Turks occupied new territories on the Balkans. In 1372 they invaded Bulgaria once more and, after sanguinary fighting, they eventually took a number of fortresses in the Rhodopes, Thrace and at the foothills of the Balkan Range. The new Bulgarian tsar Ivan Shishman (1371-1393) was forced to become a vassal to the Turkish sultan.

The dramatic situation in Bulgaria and the Balkan states was not yet clear to the Roman Catholic West. Instead of assisting the Christians of the East in those years, Western Europe preferred to take part in the division of the Balkan heritage. A crusade led by Amadeus VI of Savoy, allegedly directed against the Turks, took the Bulgarian southern Black Sea littoral in 1366. In 1365 the Hungarians occupied the break-away Bulgarian state of Vidin. They were driven out of there by the Bulgarians in 1369 at the cost of great effort. Genoa got involved in a long war with the Bulgarian despotate of Dobrudja which ended as late as 1387.

This short-sighted policy of the West helped the Turks to continue their expansion in the Balkans. In 1378 the new political power of Islam, the Ottoman empire, went to fresh war against Bulgaria and Serbia. The strategic forts of Sofia and Niš were conquered after fierce battles in 1388 and 1385 respectively. The Ottoman empire wedged deeply between Bulgarians and Serbs. The impending frightful danger forced Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and some other Bulgarian and Serbian break-away feudal possessions to enter, at long last, into a military and political alliance in 1387. The events





which took place after this act showed that it was a step in the right direction. In spite of the coalition missing a number of the strong Bulgarian, Serbian and all Byzantine feudal possessions, the united Christian troops succeeded in striking a heavy blow on the Islamic army, believed to be invincible until then, at Plochnik in 1387. It was unfortunate that the following year, when the Ottomans raided Bulgaria again, no one bothered to come to its assistance. After strenuous fighting, the northeastern part of Bulgaria fell to the Turks. A peace treaty confirmed Bulgaria as a vassal to the Islamic Ottoman empire.

Then the Turks fixed their eyes on Serbia and Bosnia. In 1389 they met the armies of the southern Slavs in a decisive battle on Kosovo Pole (meaning the Field of Blackbirds). Despite the vassalage, Bulgarian contingents also joined the Serbian army. The Turks won the battle in which the leaders of both armies, prince

*Bird's-eye-view of Baba Vida Castle at Vidin on the Danube.*



*Gate of the castle at Nikopol — the last asylum of tsar Ivan Shishman.*



*Silver coin from the reign of tsar Srat-simir (1356-1396).*



Lazar and sultan Murad got killed. This was the actual end of the clash between the Christian East and the invasive Islamism. The Ottomans had an overwhelming superiority in combat forces and it was only their crippling losses at Plochnik, Kossovo and in the northern Bulgaria campaign between 1387 and 1389, that prolonged the agony of the Bulgarian states. In 1393, Great Turnovo — the capital of Bulgaria, was brought to heel and in 1395 tsar Ivan Shishman was killed in the defence of Nicopolis on the Danube. Three other Bulgarian break-away states — the despotates of Dobrudja, Prilep and Velbazhd, fell before the end of that year. Only the Bulgarian state of Vidin remained as a deserted island in the ocean of Turkish possessions.

At last Western Europe had realized the danger of the Muslim invasion. The bellicosity, or rather the enmity of Islamism to anything not conforming to its ideology and its uttermost intolerance to the European values, compelled the European political minds to organize a massive crusade against the Turks. In 1396 over 60 000 West European crussaders, led by king Sigismund invaded the Bulgarian lands. The troops of tsar Ivan Srat-simir (1356-1396), ruler of the last Bulgarian state, joined the West European army. The united forces of the Eastern and the Western Christians, having obviously disregarded their imbecile religious arguments in the face of the Islam, reached as far as Nicopolis. There, beneath the walls of the ancient Bulgarian fortress, the crussaders, lacking in coordinated and orderly command, let themselves be defeated by the Turks once again. The Vidin despotate lost its independence, too. This put an end to the medieval Bulgarian statehood. The Byzantine empire and the kingdom of Serbia were both destroyed a few decades after. The European Southeast found itself in the hands of a hostile Asiatic power.

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The seven-century presence of the medieval Bulgarian state on the European political stage significantly contributed to the development and shaping up of the medieval state-governed way of life on the Old Continent, which later became the basis of the modern European civilization. The Bulgarian political thought saw to the establishment of the first state in Europe on the national identity principle in contrast to the states advocating the principles of the universal state. The latter would have doomed all new state formations to political, cultural and national loss of identity. Having reached the heights of a great power, it put Europe's political equilibrium right by balancing or countering the ambitions of the two imperial mainstays — the Holy Roman empire in the west and Byzantium in the east. On the other hand, the might of the Bulgar-





ian state was a barrier to the waves of barbarians dashing at Europe and to the onslaughts of Muslims invading it. The blood of its men, shed on the battle-fields, had guaranteed the peaceful development of the European West. The introduction of the nationally spoken language into the workings of the state as well as in church service and literature gave example of democracy and pluralism in culture.

*Dwelling-cum-defence turret from the Bialgrad fortress at the village of Gougoutka, Kurdjali region; fifteenth century.*





Linonia:~

Moscouia:~

# EVROPA



Hugaria

Valachia

Sclauonia



Dalmatia.

Grecia.

Turqa

Asia minor.

Armenia.

Mlegalia



BRITANNIA



## THE BULGARIAN PEOPLE UNDER THE RULE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE 15th-18th c.

*Map of the eastern Mediterranean from the Atlas of Diego Jomem (1561); now at the National Library in Vienna.*

The fall of the medieval Bulgarian states under the Ottoman rule interrupted the Bulgarian people's natural development within the framework of the European civilization. To the Bulgarians that was not just a temporary loss of their state independence as it was in the case of other European peoples which had had this bitter experience at different stages of their history. In the course of centuries the Bulgarians were forced to live under a state and political system that was substantially different from and distinctly alien to the European civilization which had evolved on the basis of Christianity and the Christian economic, social and cultural patterns. The intrusive nature of Islamism and its intolerance to anything that was not part of it, resulted in the continued confrontation between the Ottoman empire and Christian Europe in the 15th-18th centuries. That fact drew an iron curtain between the Bulgarian people on the one side, and Europe and the free Slav countries on the other. In other words, Bulgaria was separated from the progressive trends of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as well as from the nascent modern bourgeois world. The Bulgarians were pushed into a direction of development which had nothing in common with their seven-century history until then, history deeply connected with the natural course of the European political, economic and cultural development.

*Book of four gospels; sixteenth century.*



The Turkish conquerors ruthlessly destroyed all Bulgarian state and religious structures. The natural political leaders of the people in the Middle Ages, i.e. the boyars and the higher clergy, vanished from sight. That deprived the Bulgarians of both the possibility for self-organisation and any chance of having foreign political allies for centuries on end.

The place allotted to the Bulgarian people in the Ottoman feudal political system entitled it to no legal, religious, national, even biological rights as Bulgarian Christians. They had all been reduced to the category of the so called *rayah* (meaning 'a flock', attributed to the non-Muslim subjects of the empire). The peasants who represented the better half of the Bulgarian population were dispossessed of their land. According to the Ottoman feudal system which remained effective until 1834, all of it belonged to the central power in the person of the Turkish sultan. The Bulgarians were allowed to cultivate only some plots. Groups of rural Christian families, varying in number, were put under an obligation to give part of their income to representatives of the Muslim military, administrative and



religious upper crust, as well as to fulfil various state duties. The number of the families liable to that payment was determined according to their position in the Ottoman state, military and religious hierarchy. The establishment of that kind of intercourse in agriculture — the fundamental pillar of the economy at that time, clearly led to the total loss of motivation for any real farming or any production improvements both among the peasants and the feof-holders. The complex and incredibly burdensome tax system forced the farmers to produce as much as needed for their families' subsistence, while the feudals preferred to earn a lot more from looting and from the incessantly successful wars waged by the Ottoman empire in all directions until the end of the 17th century.

The Ottoman Turkish state was founded on and propped up by the dogmas of the Koran. At the beginning of the 15th century when the empire prostrated from India to Gibraltar and from the



*Bridge over the Maritsa river at Svilengrad, Haskovo region; fifteenth century.*

mouth of the Volga to Vienna, it proclaimed itself the supreme leader of Islam — Prophet Mohammed's standard and sword, and a leader of the Koran-prescribed perpetual *jihad* (holy war) against the world of Christianity. It went without saying that under this conception the Bulgarian Christians could not hope for any access to even the lowest levels of statecraft. The enormous imperial bureaucratic machinery recruited its staff only from among Muslims.

The Bulgarian people was subjected to national and religious discrimination unheard of in the annals of all European history. During court proceedings, for example, a single Muslim's testimony was more than enough to confute the evidence of dozens of Christian witnesses. The Bulgarians were not entitled to building churches, setting up their offices or even to wearing bright colours. Of the numerous taxes (about 80 in number) the so called 'fresh blood tax' (a levy of Christian youths) was particularly heavy and humili-



ating. At regular intervals, the authorities had the healthiest male-children taken away from their parents, sent to the capital, converted into Islam and then trained in combat skills. Raised and trained in the spirit of Islamic fanaticism, the young men were conscripted in the so called *janissary* corps, the imperial army of utmost belligerence known to have caused so much trouble and suffering to both the Bulgarians and Christian Europe.

The Turkish authorities exerted unabating pressure on parts of the Bulgarian people to make them convert their faith and become Muslims. That policy was meant to limit the Bulgarian ethnos parameters and to increase the Turkish population numbers. For, according to the medieval standards in that part of Europe, the affiliation of a given people was determined by the religion it followed. With a view to facilitating the assimilation process, the Turkish authorities took the Christian names of those who had converted into Islam and gave them Arab names instead.

A variety of ways and means was used in the assimilation of the Bulgarian people. Some of these were the aforementioned 'blood tax' and the regular kidnaping of children, pretty women, girls and young men to Turkish families. Quite frequently, whole areas were encircled by troops and their inhabitants forced to adopt Islam and new Arab names, while the objectors were 'edifyingly' slain. In those cases, however, the 'new Muslims' were allowed to go on living in the compact Bulgarian environment, i.e. as a community which retained both its language and its Bulgarian national consciousness. The present-day Bulgarian Muslims representing about five percent of modern Bulgaria's population, are descendants of those Mohammedanized Bulgarians, whom the Bulgarian Christians used to call *pomaks* (from the Bulgarian root-words *macha* or *maka*, meaning harassed or caused to suffer). And yet the thousands of Bulgarians whom Bulgaria lost once and for all

Sixteenth century map of the Mediterranean (fragment). Cartographer Juan Martinez; National Library, Vienna.







Fragment of a map of the world (1458) with the Bulgarian lands on it. Cartographer Fra Mauro; kept at the Palace of Doges in Venice.

Dwelling-cum-defence turret from Kyustendil; fifteenth century.



were those who had been subjected to individual conversion to Islam. For, it is only natural that having fallen into a community of strangers, speaking a different language and practising different customs and faith, they had easily and quickly been assimilated. The genocide carried out by the Ottoman Turks during hostilities in the Bulgarian lands, at the time of uprising or riot suppression, during the frequent spells of feudal anarchy, or even of Ottoman troops move-ups from garrison stations to the battle-field, had struck heavy blows on the Bulgarian nation. The Bulgarian Christian population was treated as infidel and hostile and it was outlawed even at the time of peace. Individual and mass emigration of Bulgarians to foreign lands was another cause for no lesser losses to the Bulgarian nation. There were times when whole regions became depopulated. Thus, in 1688-1689 the whole of the north-eastern Bulgarian population emigrated and in 1829-1830 the same thing happened with the population of southeastern Bulgaria, Thrace, etc. Unprotected by Bulgarian state, religious and cultural institutions the immigrants, with only few exceptions, amalgamated into the people whose country had received them. That was the way in which thousands of Bulgarian immigrants had vanished in Romania, Hungary and Serbia.

During the 15th-17th centuries the Bulgarian nation had suffered a gradual but grave biological collapse which predetermined, to a large extent, its demographic, economic, political and cultural place in the European civilization. According to some Bulgarian historians' estimations, the beginning of the Turkish oppression in the 15th century found Bulgaria with a population of about 1.3 million. Those were the then demographic parameters of any of the large European nations, for example, the population in the present-day territories of England, France or Germany. One hundred years later, the Bulgarians were already down to 260 000 people and remained as many in the course of two more centuries. The demographic growth was suppressed through genocide, Mohammedanization and emigration. The biological collapse of the 15th-17th centuries had repercussions which are still being keenly felt. The Bulgarian nation, nowadays, amounts to some ten million people while its European equals in number, back in the 15th century, are now sixty to eighty million-strong.

The unbearable conditions during the Ottoman yoke could not deaden the Bulgarians' anxiety for resistance. Deprived of social and political organizations of their own, they were unable to undertake any sizeable liberation initiatives. Thus, during the first centuries of the oppression, armed resistance was only of local and sporadic nature. The so-called *haidouk* movement was its most frequent manifestation. The *haidouks* were brave Bulgarians who took refuge in the high-mountain woods, organizing there small armed





detachments and bringing them down for merciless struggle against the provincial administrators. This guerrilla-type struggle continued for centuries on end (one group destroyed was instantaneously replaced by another) and succeeded in sustaining the morale of the Bulgarians by preserving, to some extent, their properties and their honour. In some places, it even had the authorities maintain more humane relationships with the Bulgarian Christians. The *haidouk* movement indirectly encouraged and safeguarded other forms of resistance such as maintaining the style of life, the language, the traditions and the religion, or incomppliance with forced obligations and refusal to pay heavy unjustified tax.

Liberation uprisings were the supreme form of struggle against the oppressors. The first one broke out still in 1408. Significant uprisings, proclaiming the independence of Bulgaria, took place in 1598, 1686, 1688 and 1689. They were connected with the anti-Ottoman wars waged by the West European Catholic states with which some Bulgarian representatives, mainly merchants and both Orthodox and Catholic clergymen, had established joint venture contacts. All insurrections were quelled and accompanied with inhuman atrocities.

The Bulgarian people were living through one of the most difficult periods in its centuries long existence. It had been deprived of its state, its church, its intelligentsia and its legitimate rights. Furthermore, its survival as an ethnos had also been put at stake. Under the heel of that powerful, ruthless and uncivilized Asiatic despotism, it lasted out but remained without any substantial material and spiritual resources needed for its further development. Thus, the Bulgarians, along with all the other European peoples which had been engulfed by the Ottoman empire, were to lag some centuries behind the attainments of present-day Europe.

*Medieval fortress at Shumen.*







## THE BULGARIAN REVIVAL

In the middle of the 17th century the feudal Ottoman empire plunged into serious decline. Significantly behind Christian Europe in a technological aspect, it gradually began losing the 'holy war against the unfaithful'. In 1571 the bells of the Holy league of Christian fleets tolled the beginning of the end of its military might at Lepanto. By force of habit the Ottoman war machinery kept pushing the imperial troops towards the heart of Europe, but their strength was obviously no longer up to the task. In 1683, after a series of ups and downs and at the expense of heavy bloodshed, the Ottoman armies were brought to utter catastrophe at Vienna by the troops of the Holy league. The latter combined the efforts of the European states to which Muslim aggression was a menace — Venice, Austria, Poland and Russia. Christian Europe was already on the offensive and thereon the European possessions of the Ottoman empire were to be consistently shrinking.

Incapable of reforming itself in the spirit of the new times, the decrepit empire sank into a deep economic and social crisis which was never overcome. Dry rot had long been growing into obvious corruption all over the Ottoman government and economic administration. This created favourable conditions for the preparation and the actual attainment of Bulgaria's national liberation. In its essence this process had the features and the character of a bourgeois-democratic revolution. As a result of the all-round economic, political and cultural uplift of the Bulgarian society in the 17th-19th centuries, there arose a natural conflict between the new Bulgarian

*St. John of Rila with Scenes from His Life; seventeenth century, Rila monastery.*

*Tectonic complex of the Revival period found at the town of Tryavna.*







*Dwelling-cum-defence tower at the town of Vratsa; seventeenth century.*

*Water-operated fulling-mill; eighteen century.*



bourgeoisie and the Turkish feudal state. The specific conditions of life, peculiar to Bulgaria and its people, determined the character of this conflict. Unlike the other economic analogues in Europe, it was not only of social but also of national bearing. The decline of the Ottoman Turkish state, paradoxical as it may sound, was one of the strongest incentives for the economic upsurge of the Bulgarian people. Exempted from participation in the imperial armies, the Bulgarians did not suffer the monstrous losses, incurred during the post-seventeenth century unsuccessful wars which had reduced the number of the Turkish population in the Bulgarian lands several times. Lacking in basic living culture and obsessed with the Muslim fanatical prejudice that no disease cure could be better than the one from the hands of Allah, the Turkish population had tangibly shrunk as a result of the frequent plague epidemics. These did not affect the Bulgarians who had the experience, the knowledge and the will to fight any illness. Despite its losses in the previous centuries, the Bulgarian Christian population considerably outnumbered the Muslim part of it through the whole of the 18th century. In some towns and even in whole regions, the Turkish population was represented only by the families of the local administration sent to work there.

In the new conditions the labour-devoted Bulgarians, quite unexpectedly, turned out to be much better off than the sparse Muslim population lacking in economic experience as a result of its centuries long sole responsibility — to be part of the war machinery of the empire. Slowly but steadily craft manufacture — the foundation of all manufacturing industry in the Bulgarian lands, passed into the hands of the nascent Bulgarian bourgeois class. This Bulgarian-manned crafts industry was reorganized on the basis of new bourgeois manufacture principles. The incorporation of the Ottoman empire into the European capitalist economic system gave further impetus to manufacture and trade. International trade was chiefly carried out by Bulgarian merchants, who had accumulated capital to invest it in the expansion and modernization of new enterprises. Upon the official abolition of the feudal system of land ownership, the bourgeois style of production penetrated in agriculture, too. The peasants started buying their land back from the Ottoman authorities or from Muslims nearly ruined and got down to organising prosperous private farms. Big farms called *chifliks* occupied themselves with wholesale food production. Towards the end of the Ottoman rule in the Bulgarian lands the *chifliks* comprised about twenty five percent of all land and of the total agricultural produce.

The economic development of the Bulgarians was impeded by the Ottoman political reality. As late as the middle of the 19th century, a number of historical factors made the Turkish government





Captain Georgi Mamarchev (1786-1846) — a Bulgarian revolutionary. He participated in the Russo-Turkish wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century and engineered the 'Velchova Zavera' attempt to rise an insurrection against the Ottoman oppression.

Shkoloto — a school of the Revival period in Tryavna, Gabrovo region.

unable to abolish the medieval feudal pattern of statecraft and management of its economy. Heavy tax, absence of state protection, corrupt administration, lack of legal guarantees and national discrimination — these were some of the hindrances to substantial industry. A scrutinizing look at the Turkish state realities and potentialities for headway development brought the various strata of the Bulgarian society to the conclusion that there would be no future for them within the boundaries of that state. The Bulgarians from all walks of life, the Bulgarian bourgeoisie in particular, were interested in restoring the Bulgarian independence and building up a modern Bulgarian state. It was the bourgeoisie who were at the head of the Bulgarian national liberation movement during the 19th century.

The struggle for national liberation flared up with several parallel actions launched almost at the same time. The movement for national enlightenment and for independent Bulgarian church was the first to break out as it was possible to wage with methods prescribed by the law. This slant was extremely important in the first decades of the 19th century since the Bulgarians were not officially recognized as a separate people within the Ottoman empire. When the Turks conquered the country at the end of the 15th century, they placed the Bulgarian bishoprics under the oecumenical patriarchate in Constantinople and considered all Christian peoples one Romilet i.e. a Roman people. That Graecized Christian institution with corruption pervading it, unloaded fresh tax burden on the Bulgarians, and yet, the consequences of the official introduction of the Greek language in public worship and in schools were much more detrimental. This tendency extended particularly after the establishment of the Greek state independence in 1829. The Greek bishops in the Bulgarian lands became ardent supporters of the so called Greek state *megali* idea, envisaging restoration of the Byz-







antine empire within the boundaries of the Balkan Peninsula. They did not acknowledge the Bulgarians existing as an independent ethnic community and waged persistent struggle aiming at their denationalization.

The Bulgarian society reacted sharply to the nationalistic ambitions of the patriarchate in Constantinople. The local communities led a stubborn struggle against the Greek bishops' presence in the Bulgarian bishoprics. Meanwhile a network of Bulgarian elementary and secondary schools was set up. The Bulgarian initial demands boiled down to requests for the replacement of the Greek bishops with Bulgarian ones and for the wide-spread use of the Bulgarian language in church service. The patriarchate in Constantinople was relentless which made the Bulgarians claim full independence of the Bulgarian church immediately after the Crimean War in 1858. Between 1856-1860 the Greek bishops were expelled

*Chalice lid made of silver and gilt; eighteenth century.*

*Rhipid of Christos Emanuel; 1594.*



from everywhere. A national centre took shape around the Bulgarian community in Constantinople, attracting eminent writers and public figures. That centre took up the leadership of church independence struggle. On 3 April 1860, during Easter Sunday service in Constantinople, the Bulgarian bishop Illarion of Makariopol expressed the will of the whole Bulgarian people by solemnly proclaiming the separation of the Bulgarian church from the patriarchate in Constantinople. The day commemorating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ coincided with the resuscitation of the Bulgarian people. However, that unilateral act of the Bulgarians was not sanctioned either by the see of Constantinople or by the Turkish government. Russia, in her capacity as patron of the Orthodox peoples within the boundaries of the Muslim empire — a right obtained as a result of her victories over the Turks, did not approve of it either. The struggle continued for another ten years. It was only when the Catholic propaganda in the Bulgarian lands became disturbingly successful that Russia changed her attitude and, eventually, forced Turkey to recognise *de jure* the situation which had existed *de facto*. In 1870 a firman of the sultan decreed the establishment of an autonomous Bulgarian church institution — the Bulgarian exarchate. All lands inhabited by Bulgarians in Moesia, Thrace, Dobrudja and a large part of Macedonia came under its jurisdiction.

The independence of the church and the establishment of national educational institutions became heralds of the victory of the Bulgarian national revolution for at least two reasons: they put an end to the assimilation of the Bulgarian population and led to the formal international recognition of the Bulgarian nation.

The struggle for autonomous church and for national enlightenment and culture was waged along with the struggle for the political liberation of the country. On this problem the Bulgarian bourgeoisie was not united. Some circles were of the opinion that

Icon stand from the Arnaudov House;  
Etropole, Sofia region.

Wooden portico from the Doncho Popov  
House at the village of Bozhentsi;  
Gabrovo region; nineteenth century.







Scene with Jesus just relieved from the Crucifix, depicted on a church shroud of the seventeenth century.

Georgi Rakovski.



the Bulgarians had not been up to carrying out the armed revolution by themselves and thus prescribed help from abroad, mainly from the neighbouring Balkan countries and Russia. The upholders of this standpoint cared to organise large Bulgarian armed detachments for both the Russo-Turkish wars and the liberation uprisings of the other Balkan peoples. Their opponents thought it possible to achieve the cherished political independence by duplicating the so called 'Hungarian pattern' — a velvet revolution within the Turkish state by gradually infiltrating the upper tiers of power in the economy, local government, culture and education and then, by turning the Muslim empire into something like the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary.

The most radically-minded part of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie saw no other way to the liberation of Bulgaria except the one passing through the cathartic flames of a nation-wide armed revolution. The first leader of that ideological trend was Georgi Rakovski. As for the tactics, obviously influenced by past experiences of the *haidouk* movement, he envisaged the setting up of Bulgarian armed detachments in all of Turkey's Balkan neighbouring states whose task it would be to make their way into the Bulgarian lands. Rakovski expected these armed main bodies to grow into an avalanche of discontented Bulgarians who would spontaneously join in to ultimately form a strong national army capable of winning the country's independence.

Rakovski's attempts in the 60s to carry out the Bulgarian national revolution with 'pressure and sword' failed. Taking advantage of conflicting situations between the Balkan states and their Muslim neighbour Rakovski tried, on several occasions, to make his dream of shaping up the kernel of the Bulgarian national army come true. However, upon the settlement of any of these conflicts, the governments of Serbia and Romania always found their own reasons and excuses to limit Rakovski's activity. In 1867 Rakovski died. His death put an end to one of the significant stages of the Bulgarian national revolution.

Rakovski's revolutionary activity awakened the Bulgarian immigrants in Romania and Russia. Their activity was a direct after-effect of the changes taking place in European political life. The unification of Germany, the liberation of Italy, the autonomy of Hungary — all these events inspired hope for the approaching settlement of the Bulgarian national question. Several centres of revolutionary activity had been set up to unite various groups of the Bulgarian immigrant bourgeoisie looking for the best possible way to national liberation. Their quests ranged from political combinations with Balkan and European powers, through revolutionary printed propaganda to the dispatch of armed detachments to the Bulgarian lands. In 1868 the last one of these, known as the *cheta*



of Stefan Karadja and Hadji Dimiter, consisted only of 120 men but they had both the Balkans and Europe lost in admiration for their heroism. Leading ceaseless battles against the Turkish regular and mercenary troops many thousands strong, the *cheta* crossed Moesia. Stranded and besieged in the Balkan Range, the revolutionaries fought to the last bullet. Rather than surrendering they died in a desperate man-to-man battle.

After the failure of Rakovski's tactics and the utter defeat of the detachments in 1867-1868, the Bulgarian liberation movement entered a phase of total reassessment of its revolutionary strategy and tactics. In Bucharest in 1869, young revolutionaries moving in the circle of the eminent Bulgarian intellectual Liuben Karavelov and his newspaper *Svoboda* (Freedom) formed a group which was the precursor of a Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC), set up before the end of that year. This new centre had the revolutionary trends merge and come under the same hat. The centre's political programme subjected to criticism the social situation in Turkey, condemning it as an indecent anachronism in the modern European civilisation and exposing the Turkish government as the obvious adversary to human rights and human progress. Karavelov's notion of the liberation revolution placed, first and foremost, reliance on the Bulgarian people and then, on aid from a foreign power. He wrote: 'The Bulgarians should not count on Napoleon III, Alexander II, Pius IX or Queen Victoria, they should rely only on themselves'. In this the staunch democrat saw a prerequisite for Bulgaria 'to set its state in order, according to the best ordinances (read 'constitutions') which had already been used by the enlightened peoples — the American, the Belgian and the Swiss'.

However, in 1869-1870 the BRCC confined its activities to nothing else but verbose public statements. The centre did not undertake any real practicable measures. For this reason, a group of radically-minded associates with Vassil Levski at the head of it, launched some resolute and efficient initiatives aiming at the political liberation of Bulgaria.

Vassil Levski, whom the present-day Bulgarians consider their greatest national hero of all times and epochs, was born in Karlovo, a prosperous centre of craft-industry in 1837. At the age of twenty four he took the vows of a deacon. The lot in store for the young Bulgarian was obviously not the one of a monk living in resignation to the world. In 1862 he fled to Serbia and enlisted as a volunteer in the Bulgarian legion raised by Rakovski. The legion took part in the Serbo—Turkish hostilities. Between 1862-1868 Levski participated in almost all Bulgarian armed assaults against the Ottoman empire.

The revolutionary theory which took form in Vassil Levski's mind towards the end of the 60s, turned out to be a leap forward



Guest room with built-in cupboards from the Kyorpeev House (1813) in Kotel, Sliven region.

Banner of Filip Totyo's cheta.







*Vassil Levski.*

for the Bulgarian liberation movement. Levski viewed the national liberation revolution as a concomitant armed upheaval of the whole Bulgarian population in the Ottoman empire. It followed that this uprising had to be well-prepared in advance, with all adequate military training and proper coordination on the part of an internal revolutionary organisation branching out into committees in each living area. That organisation was supposed to operate independent from the plans or the political combinations of any foreign powers which, as known by previous experience, had brought only trouble and failure to the national revolutionary cause.

Levski also determined the future form of government in liberated Bulgaria — a democratic republic, standing on the principles of the Human and Citizen Rights Charter of the Great French Revolution. That was the only document hitherto known to guarantee the individual freedom of expression, speech and association. In their essence Levski's ideas tallied with the most radical ideas of the European bourgeois-democratic revolution.

In more practical terms, in 1869 Levski addressed himself to the task of setting up local committees. By the middle of 1872 he had scoured the Bulgarian lands with the dedication of an apostle, and succeeded in establishing a strong network of committees in hundreds of Bulgarian towns and villages which were in constant contact with and subordination to the clandestine government in the town of Lovech. They provided weapons, organised combat detachments, and got traitors and Turkish officials punished.

In May 1872, the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee and the Internal Revolutionary Organization, convinced that a co-ordination of the efforts would be for the general good, merged into one organization. Revolutionary uplift overwhelmed the whole country.

This enthusiasm was short-lived as only a few months on, in the autumn of that year, during a robbery of a Turkish post-office meant to procure money for weapons, the Turkish police picked up the trail of some committees in northeast Bulgaria including the organization headquarters in Lovech. Numerous arrests of revolutionaries followed, threatening the organization to fall through. Karavelov demanded that Levski should immediately rise the Bulgarians in revolt. Levski, who was in Bulgaria at that time and was well-aware that the population was yet unprepared, refused to fulfil the order and tried to take into his charge all documentation belonging to the organisation — a safety precaution against its getting into Turkish hand, which could destroy the movement completely. Unfortunately, he himself fell in the hands of the Turkish authorities who put him on trial and sentenced him to death by hanging. Levski was sent to the gallows in Sofia in February 1837. The death of Vassil Levski — a generally recognized leader of the

*Vassil Levski's refuge at Etropole monastery.*



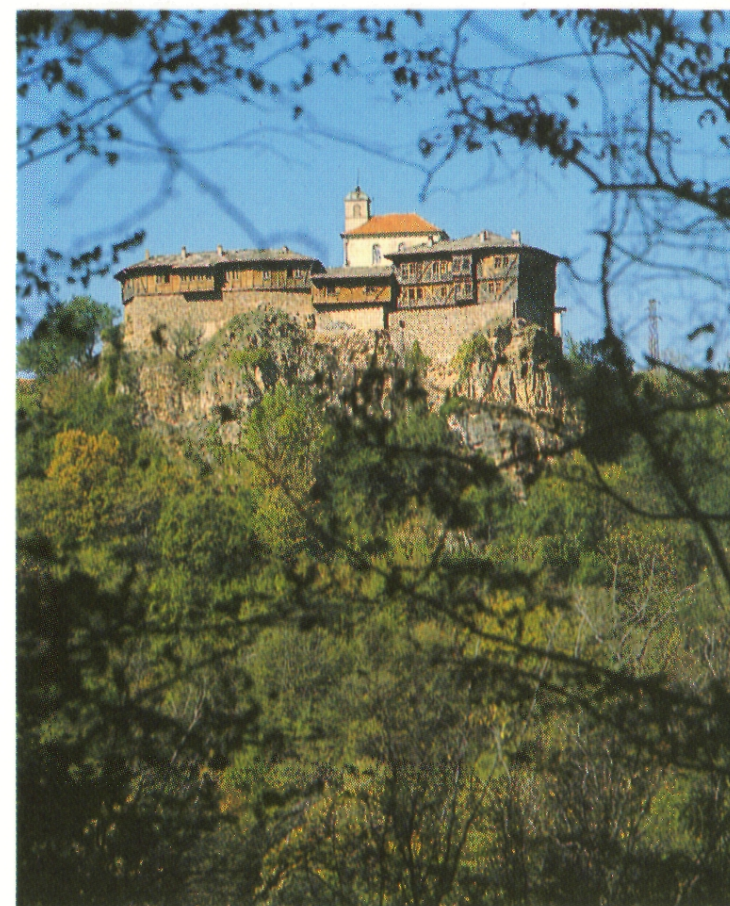




national revolutionary movement, caused temporary crisis. The Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee was groping for new ways and means. A number of revolutionaries undertook actions without coordinating them with the underground headquarters, while others sank into apathy.

By 1875 a group of young revolutionaries — Hristo Botev, Stefan Stambolov, Nikola Obretenov and others, was ready to play an important role in the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee. They attempted at and partly succeeded in restoring the internal revolutionary committee network. Taking advantage of the deep crisis of the Ottoman empire (in 1875 Turkey was adjudged bankrupt, while Bosnia and Herzegovina were shaken up by uprisings), the young revolutionaries speeded up the preparation for an armed uprising. It broke out in the spring of 1876 and was recorded in the annals of Bulgarian history as the April uprising.

However, that uprising did not spread all over the Bulgarian lands. Only the towns and villages, nestling among the mountain hills surrounding Plovdiv — the capital city of Thrace, rose on a mass scale. In the other regions only guerilla detachments had been set up. After several days of heroic fighting, it was crushed with cruelty unheard of in the human history. The Turkish atrocities were unprecedented. The troops made a massacre of the population both in rebellious and non-rebellious settlements. In some places the inhabitants were killed to the last man without distinction of age or sex. The Bulgarian immigrants in Romania formed a detachment of 200 rebels. Led by Hristo Botev, they seized the Austrian packet boat 'Radetzky' and, eventually, landed on the Bulgarian bank of the Danube. It took some heroic battles for this *cheta* (detachment) to be defeated, too. That happened in June 1876 when the Bulgarian liberation uprising was fought to its bitter end.



*Glozhene monastery. It had a special hide-out ready for Vassil Levski while its abbot, Hadji Euphtimius was member of an underground revolutionary committee.*

*The hanging of Vassil Levski. Artist Boris Angelushev.*







## THE LIBERATION OF BULGARIA

The Turkish atrocities that accompanied the April uprising illustrated to the whole world the true face of the Ottoman state and its barbarity. World public opinion raised its voice in defence of the Bulgarian people. British, American, Italian, French, German and Russian journalists and consuls made known to their governments and their peoples the truth about these monstrous crimes. Prominent statesmen, political and public figures, intellectuals and scholars to whom the Bulgarians would always be indebted, joined in a campaign for the Bulgarians' right to lead free life. Some of the names that stand out among the champions of the Bulgarian people's cause are those of William Gladstone — leader of the Liberal party of Britain, Charles Darwin, Oscar Wilde, Victor Hugo and Giuseppe Garibaldi. The first Chancellor of the German Reich, Bismarck made a speech in the *Reichstag* to the effect that the abominable bloodshed in Bulgaria had rendered Turkey no longer eligible to a place in the community of the European states.

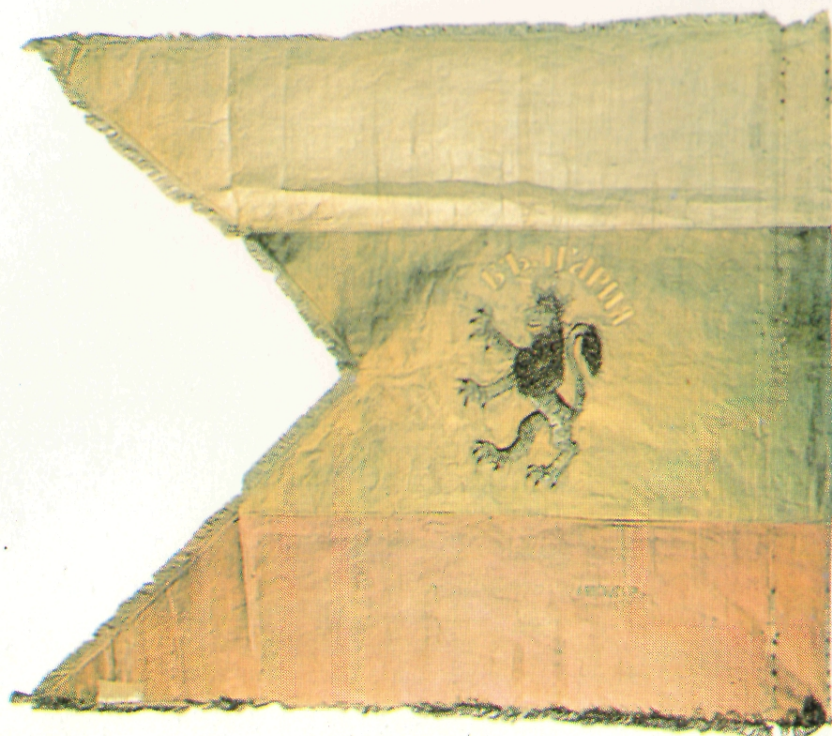
The events in Bulgaria had admittedly raised a tide of compassion, solidarity and willingness for support among the Russian public. The Russian people, sharing with the Bulgarians kindred languages, cultures and religions, insisted that its emperor and government circles declare war on Turkey.

The Russian government did not evidently see any reasons for not responding to the Russian and European public outcry since it coincided with the long-term objectives of Russian policies with respect to Turkey. These envisaged total destruction of the Turkish

*Lithographic picture commemorating the independence of the Bulgarian church from the Greek oecumenical patriarchate. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*

*Water-colour picture of Troyan monastery of the nineteenth century. Artist Felix Kanitz; now at the Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.*

*Mock-up of the first Bulgarian national flag; 1878; Army History Museum in Sofia.*





empire and annexation of most of its lands to the Russian empire. The plan was to achieve this either directly or by allowing the existence of formally independent states which would effectively come under Russia's sway. Russia's interests in this region, however, clashed with the interests of other European powers such as Britain and Austria-Hungary. Either of them claimed its share of the Ottoman heritage. Moreover, everybody was afraid of a big, strong and independent state emerging in southern Europe as it could seriously impugn the Great Powers' presence in that part of the European continent. Appalled and indignant as it could be, the European public opinion also urged their respective governments to undertake decisive actions against the Asiatic barbarians.

In the summer, autumn and winter of 1876 the Russian government went out of its way to settle the Bulgarian question in a peaceful way. It made attempts to smooth its contradictions with the other European powers. The so-called Tsarigrad conference (the south Slavonic name for Constantinople) which took place in December 1876, was the culmination of their diplomatic effort with Russia, Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy all taking part in it. The joint reform-prescribing plan to which Turkey committed itself in advance, made provision for the autonomy of all Bulgarian-inhabited lands in Macedonia, Moesia, Thrace and Dobrudja. These lands were part of the two Bulgarian states with their respective capital cities of Turnovo and Sofia. The territories of these two states extended as far as the ethnic boundaries of the Bulgarian people and, despite their artificial division, they were adequate to the Bulgarians' needs and aspirations. Turkey, however, impudently rejected that plan on the very day of its signing. This last-minute prestige-harming flop made even the Turkey-supporting West European states withdraw their customary back-up and agree to a military settlement of the Bulgarian question.

*Cold steel; eighteenth-nineteenth century.*

*Sheath with a dagger in it; kept in the Town Museum of History in Panagyurishte.*





After preliminary talks with the European Great Powers on the possible outcome of hostilities, Russia declared war on Turkey on 12 April 1877. As early as that day, a military campaign was launched along the Russo-Turkish Caucasian border. On the Balkans the Russian army had to overcome the Danube — a major water barrier, before coming anywhere near the Turkish troops. The Russians crossed the Danube in June 1877. The Russian strategic war plan appeared to be based on the miscalculated presumption that Turkey was a colossus on clay stilts which should collapse at the first blow and envisaged the engagement of only a small Russian contingent 15 000-strong. Under General Gurko's command it was to rush through a narrow corridor to Constantinople and to prompt the terms of peace to the Turkish government. According to this same plan the 300 000-strong Ottoman troops in Bulgaria had to be counteracted by the Russian officers and soldiers about 250 000-strong in attacks outflanking the narrow passage.

The Bulgarian people met the news of the Russo-Turkish war with great enthusiasm and it too, rose against its centuries long oppressor. A Bulgarian military detachment called 'Bulgarian volunteers', consisting of 12 battalions 12 500-strong, joined the Russian army. Hundreds of concomitant guerilla detachments having from several dozens to several hundreds of soldiers were organised, too. These were particularly efficient in dealing with the communications and the small military groups of the enemy. Thousands of other Bulgarians directly joined the Russian army to help as reconnaissance officers, engineers of fortification facilities, medical orderlies, suppliers of fodder and food, etc.

About the middle of July, the Russian leading detachment with Bulgarian volunteer forces included in it, reached as far as Stara Zagora that was almost half-way through to Constantinople. The troops meant to protect the western flank of the Russian army in Bulgaria suffered a defeat in two assaults against the strategic fortress of Plevna, located only sixty kilometres away from the Danube. The crippled Russian army at this site was not even able to keep off the besieged Turkish army. At that time the Turkish military forces, concentrated on the eastern flanks of the corridor occupied by the Russians, also grew unimpeded. Soon their number was three times as large as the Russian troops withholoding them. Turkish crack regiments four times as big as the Russian advance detachment were coming on from its opposite direction. Having no alternative but to succumb to the superior force, the Russians and the Bulgarians withdrew to position along the Balkan Mountain ridge in the region of the Shipka pass.

Aware of its blunder, the Russian command immediately resorted to the translocation of major military formations from Russia to Bulgaria. Given travelling speed in those days the troops could



*Flintlock with decorations; eighteenth century.*





*The Battle on Shipka peak. Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

be expected to arrive at the front line not before the beginning of September. Everyone was clear that the war would be decided by the battle outcome at Shipka. If the Turkish army from southern Bulgaria succeeded in crossing over the Balkan Range and then joining one of the Turkish armies in northern Bulgaria, the Turkish command could be sure to obtain petrifying numerical superiority over the siege-imperiled Russians who should then leave Bulgaria.

As fate has strangely willed it, the liberation of Bulgaria was entirely dependent upon the efficiency of the several thousand Bulgarian volunteers in keeping their positions on Shipka in those summer days. For, due to its misjudging the direction of the Turkish main effort, the command of the forces on Shipka had to send Russian operational reserve contingents to help in the defence of Hainboaz, another throat in the mountain. The Bulgarian volunteer detachment and only one Russian regiment remained on Shipka.



During the hot days of August 1877 epic battles took place on that mountain peak at the geographical intersection point of the Bulgarian lands. There the Bulgarians proved that they thoroughly deserved their freedom. Supported by not very many Russians the Bulgarian volunteer detachment drove off dozens of frontal and flanking attacks by the much too much stronger enemy with its manyfold superior numbers of men and equipment, expected to easily vanquish volunteers, fighting with old rifle-trophies from the Franco-Prussian War. When the arms and ammunitions finished, the volunteers resorted to blank weapons to repulse the attacks. In fierce man-to-man fighting they showered boulders and other mass of rock, even their dead comrades' bodies. Pertinacious and murderous was the Bulgarians' effort that crushed the Turkish army and caused it to lose nearly half of its strength. The Bulgarian volunteers withstood their positions and thus, coped with a situation that spelled more and even greater danger.

A quick change of scene and reversal of the war occurred after the arrival of fresh Russian reinforcements. They took Plevna and, at the end of 1877, crossed the Balkan Mountains in a wide-ranging counter-offensive. Following victorious battles at Sofia, Plovdiv and Sheinovo, the Ottoman military machinery was shattered, dilapidated and ruined. A preliminary peace treaty was signed in the small town of San Stefano near Constantinople on 3 March 1878. It made provision for an autonomous Bulgarian state extending to almost all Bulgarian lands in the geographical areas of Macedonia, Thrace and Moesia. The treaty of San Stefano obtained justice for the Bulgarian people. Its terms of peace included the restoration of Bulgaria's state independence and the Bulgarians' reunification within the boundaries of one state. It, therefore, provided the solution to the paramount historic task which had confronted the Bulgarian people over the last five centuries.

Apprehensive of the existence of a big Bulgarian state under Russian influence, Austria-Hungary and Britain imposed revision of the San Stefano treaty. It took place at a congress of the Powers held in Berlin in the summer of 1878. War-weary Russia was not ready for new sabre-rattling and gave in.

The Berlin treaty dismembered the Bulgarian people into three parts. The northern Bulgarian lands (Moesia) were made into the principality of Bulgaria — an independent state under Turkish suzerainty. The lands of Thrace, called Eastern Rumelia, were made an autonomous province under the rule of the Turkish sultan. Macedonia and part of Thrace were unconditionally returned to the Turkish administration.



*Flapped hat of a Russian warrior given as an award for participation in the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878).*







## THE PRINCIPALITY OF BULGARIA

At the beginning of 1879, the assembly of notables known as the Constituent Assembly of the principality of Bulgaria was called, as provided by the Berlin congress, to elaborate and adopt the constitution of the country. The Russian lawyer Lukianov got down to drafting it. Greatly influenced by the content of the Belgian constitution, believed to be one of the most liberal statutes in the world at that time, he cared to insert principles of broad democratic freedoms. Two political trends came up as soon as debate opened — a liberal and a conservative. These were to remain in position, underlying the Bulgarian political system right through to the end of the 19th century. The conservatives insisted on a stronger monarchic sovereignty supported by an oligarchic constitution, limiting the freedom of press, meetings and association. These demands were turned down and the draft of the basic law that became known as the Turnovo Constitution, was voted by overwhelming majority.

In April 1879, the First Grand National Assembly (the Bulgarian Parliament) elected the German prince Alexander of Battenberg as prince of Bulgaria. As a Russian army officer he had participated in the Liberation War, which earned him fairly good reputation in Bulgaria.

Upon stepping up the throne, Battenberg expressed his intent to get the Turnovo Constitution amended in an anti-democratic fashion. This instantly caused the first political crisis in the country, entailing a split in the political parties, frequent cabinet changes, a pro-monarchy coup on 27 April 1881 and subsequent election intimidation, violence and counterfeit. Political life degrading was all too obvious. After dramatic vicissitudes, the democratic forces succeeded in overcoming the prince's dogged opposition and, in the middle of 1884, made him appoint a government of the moderate liberals — staunch advocates of the Turnovo Constitution.

In its foreign policy the newly liberated Bulgarian state was up against a mountain of problems. All Great Powers, Russia and Austria-Hungary in particular, strained every muscle to bring the poorly developed economy and war machinery of the principality under their sway. They grossly interfered in its internal affairs and tried hard to draw it into their own sphere of influence. The complete unification of the Bulgarian lands which had remained, in one form or another, under Turkish rule had been the main task of the Bulgarian foreign policy during the first decades after the restoration of Bulgaria's political independence. That task arising, from the

*Lithographic picture of liberated Bulgaria. Artist Georgi Danchov; kept at the St st Cyril and Methodius Library in Sofia.*

*The Turnovo Constitution of 1879.*





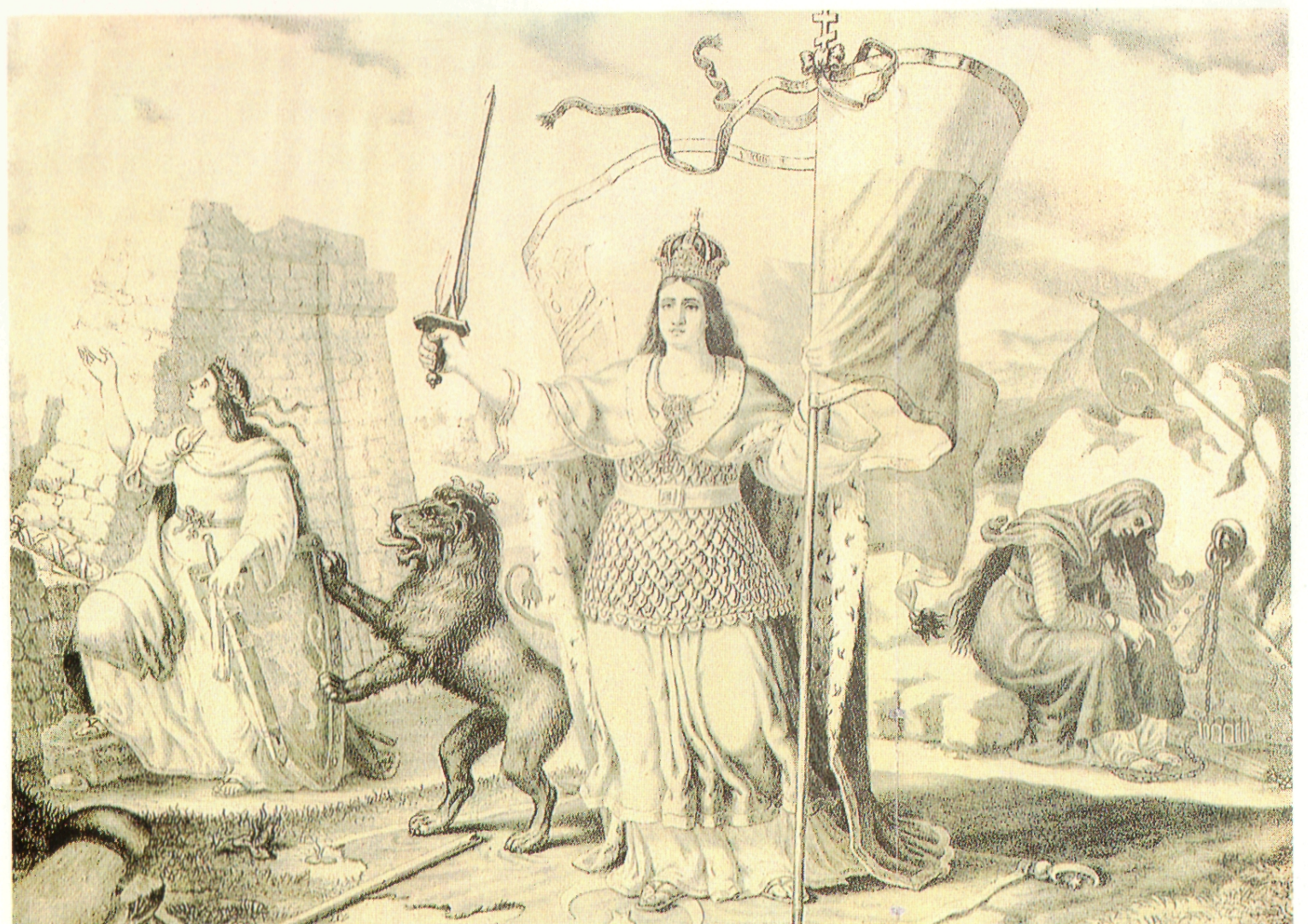


*Present-day view of the Royal Palace in Sofia built in 1883.*

wrongful provisions of the Berlin treaty, held in a powerful grasp all potentialities of the Bulgarian society and determined the foreign policy and the military priorities of Bulgaria for a long time. The latter was compelled by circumstances to expend on its implementation resources far beyond what it could afford. There was no other alternative yet as half of the Bulgarians and two thirds of their territory had remained under the barbaric feudal oppression of Turkey.

Bulgaria achieved its first major success in 1885. Between 1878-1885 masses of people in the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia, comprising the lands of Upper Thrace which were inhabited entirely by Bulgarians (the April Uprising of 1876 took place in that area), were engaged in powerful movement for their unification with the principality. They did not allow any Ottoman troops to come into the province, had its administration and army Bulgarianized, and the powers of the government confined to the walls of

*Lithographic picture of Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia split by the Berlin congress. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich; National Art Gallery in Sofia.*





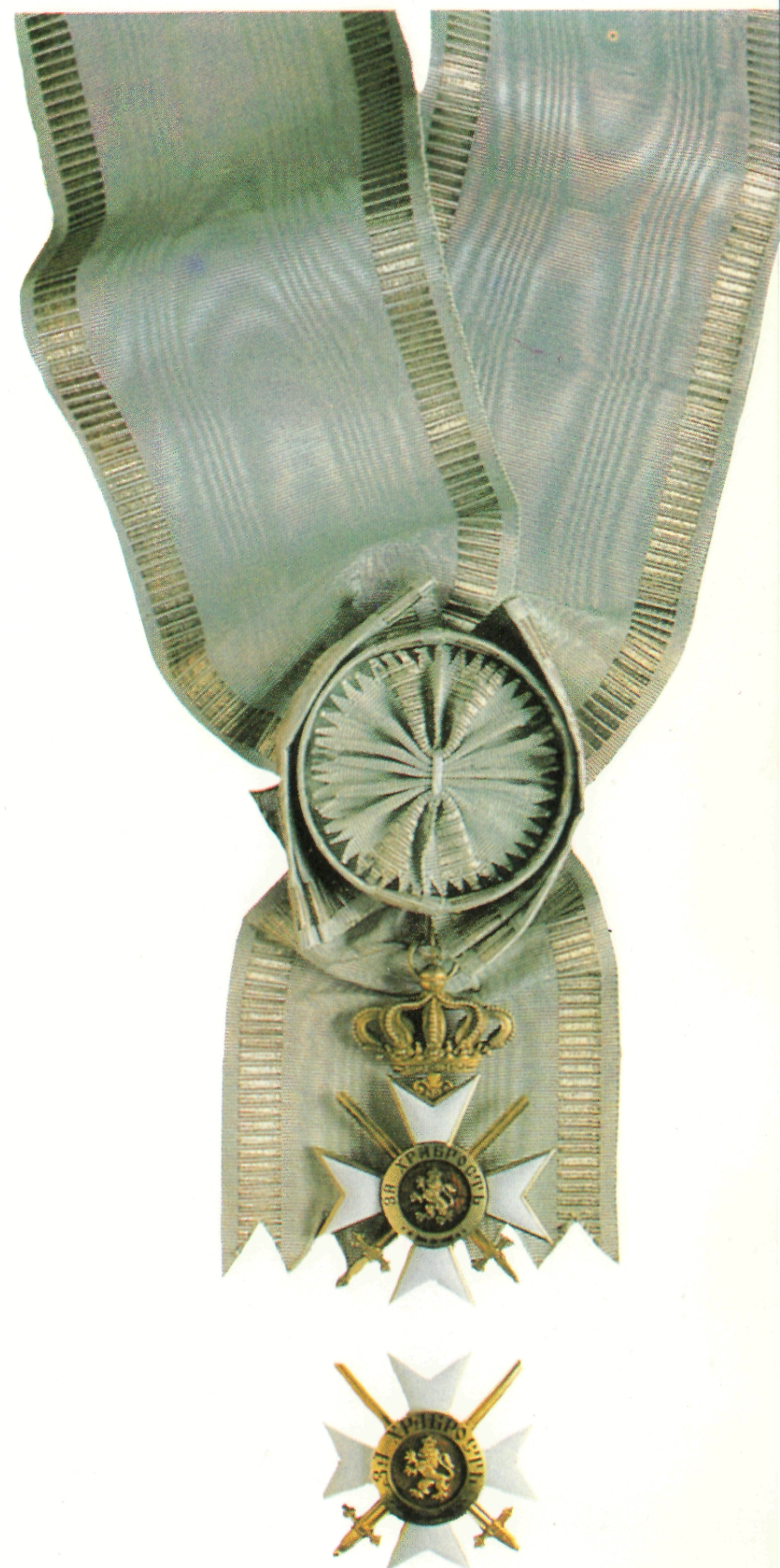
its own *chateau*. The political leaders of that movement came into direct contact with the prince and the political parties in the principality. With the frame of mind pervading, no one dared pronounce himself against the idea of actions towards the unification of the two Bulgarian states, notwithstanding anticipated complications. The secret diplomatic demarches of the Bulgarian government before the Great Powers did not bring back any clear promise for support.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of September 1885, the nationwide patriotic enthusiasm reached its climax when people's volunteer forces and regular troops overthrew the government of Eastern Rumelia and declared its unification with the principality of Bulgaria. The prince and the Bulgarian government instantly accepted that act and assumed the reins of the provincial government straight away.

The unification of Bulgaria led to political crisis almost unparalleled in the European history. Bulgaria and the Bulgarians, as it was, had taken a stand against an all-European treaty and thus, face-saving reasons alone could easily cause the Great Powers to barge in to return the status quo. There was Turkey which could hardly be expected to just grin and stomach the loss of one of its most fertile provinces. The Balkan states were also there looking on the dark side of Bulgaria becoming twice as big as before, therefore, *de jure* and *de facto*, the biggest state in the Balkans.

Turkey was expected to attack Bulgaria. The whole Bulgarian army was built up at the southern Bulgarian border to take the Turkish assault. Europe was in anticipation of diplomats to have their final say.

At this juncture tsarist Russia inconceivably blundered. It simply declared itself against the unification of Bulgaria. A plausible explanation would be that for a few years the northern empire, in



War decoration of merit — the Grand Cross (obverse) with a star, awarded as from 1st January 1880; National Army History Museum in Sofia.



The Room in which the Grand Constituent Assembly was held in Veliko Tarnovo.





*Piece of tapestry with the Resurrection embroidered on it; eighteenth century.*

its view, had consistently and single-mindedly been displeased with prince Alexander of Battenberg for his diverging the principality from the Russian sphere of influence, and that it had been trying to replace him on the throne by its protege. To top it all, Russia withdrew its officers from the Bulgarian army, i.e., divested it of superior commanders, and thus placed at a great disadvantage the fighting efficiency of the newly united state. In those days the highest rank of Bulgarian-born officers was that of a captain. This politically ill-suited decision planted a hardy element of mistrust in Russian-Bulgarian relations, a fact that had long been taken advantage of by the western powers and by representatives of the Russophobic leanings in the Bulgarian state policy.

Britain immediately availed itself of the Russian politicians' folly seeing in it an opportunity to displace Russia from one of its traditional regions of influence. Britain — chief architect of the Berlin treaty which had Bulgaria ruthlessly dismembered and a perennial warrantor of the Ottoman territorial integrity, negotiated a curve in its policies and supported the act of the unification. At the international conference, convened to counter the block of Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany all wanting to restore the status quo, Britain resolutely opposed and thus helped turn down a motion inauspicious for Bulgaria.

On 2 November 1885 events took a dramatic turn. Serbia, encouraged financially and militarily by Austria-Hungary, attacked Bulgaria by surprise. It was no longer the unification but the whole future of Bulgaria that was at stake. At that time, Bulgaria had no troops at its border with Serbia. With all its available forces located at the Turkish border, its capital was stark unprotected only 70 km away from Serbian raiding troops. Moreover, the efficiency of the Bulgarian army was questioned for good reasons — it was organised only 5-6 years before and was just deprived of all its senior instructing and commanding officers. In an atmosphere of national uplift unseen before, border-sentry detachments and local volunteer forces were able to check Serbian crack divisions at the fortified locality of Slivnitsa — the avenue of approach to the Bulgarian capital. It took the Bulgarian army only a few days to make wearisome marches to the west and once there, to go into action. Then, as it had already happened in glorious times gone, just a few days of hard fought fields at Slivnitsa, Dragoman, Piro, Nis and Vidin led up to Serbia's utter defeat. The road to Belgrade was open. At this point Austria put its oar in by sending an ultimatum which demanded cease-fire without delay.

Bulgaria's victory in this captains-versus-generals war had Europe wonder-struck and its public opinion filled with sympathy and admiration. The question of the pros and cons in reference to the unification of Bulgaria was no longer posed with its previous



acuteness. At the beginning of 1886 Bulgaria signed a peace treaty with Serbia and later, an agreement with Turkey which regularized its position as a single unified state.

Thus, Bulgaria was able to prove to the outside world that the determined and vigorous political efforts, adroit diplomacy and selfless combat zeal of a small nation fighting for a just cause, would certainly bring great national success without its servile submission in return to possible reliance on any of the Great Powers.

Events about the unification had led Bulgaria out of the Russian sphere of influence but, as it could be expected, the ruling circles in the northern empire had no intention of leaving in peace the country considered a zone of special state interest. In the spring of 1886, emperor Alexander III's diplomacy opened a single-minded campaign aimed at ousting from power the Bulgarian prince and the politicians supporting him. The Russian press set on Battenberg while Russian diplomacy was tightening the noose around Bulgaria's neck by encouraging Serbia to begin fresh hostilities and instigating Turkey to reconsider the question of Eastern Rumelia. For a number of reasons the Russian policy with respect to Bulgaria was supported by Germany and France. The new British government was in two minds about its support for Bulgaria. Towards the middle of 1886 the country fell into alarming international isolation.

The situation gave rise to a distinct polarization in the Bulgarian political circles. The prince was the one in focus from all sides. Some circles, mainly in the army which had always shown stronger pro-Russian leanings, believed that Battenberg ought to be made step down the Bulgarian throne to give way to an agreement with Russia. A predominating part of the political circles in Sofia, backed up by the vast majority of the Bulgarian people saw the prince as the person and the authority symbolizing the Independence of Bulgaria and they all stood in his support.

The touch-stone of the with-or-without-Russia dilemma was, as a matter of fact, a projection of the maturing state conception about the country's future. According to it Bulgaria, small as it was, (at that time its population was only three million) would not be able to pursue its course in history without it being under the wing of a long-standing, confirmed, reliable and economically and militantly strong ally. Russia's attitude at the time of the unification, the total lack of civil rights in the Russian empire, the impertinent behaviour of Russian diplomats in Bulgaria and their intolerably gross interference in the internal political affairs of the country, had a considerable part of the traditionally democratic Bulgarian society alienate from Russia. In the meantime, the Bulgarian bourgeoisie had also been gravitating towards the industrially developed western countries since its economic relations with them had been and still were much more beneficial than those with Russia.

*The House of the National Assembly (the Bulgarian Parliament) — present-day view. It was built in 1885-86 in neoclassicism style, amalgamating the latest architectural trends and the democratic legacy of the Bulgarian Revival.*







*The first silver coin minted in the principality of Bulgaria in 1882; circumscription reads: 'God Save Bulgaria'.*

*One of the earliest gold coins minted in the principality of Bulgaria in 1894; circumscription reads: 'God Save Bulgaria'.*



In this atmosphere of an extremely conflicting internal political life, at the end of August 1886, a group of army officers engineered a military coup. The prince was arrested and sent to Russia. That first blunder on the perpetrators' part allowed their opponents to represent the coup as an act of Russian intelligence resident in Bulgaria, and not as an internal Bulgarian event. Their second, this time fatal blunder, was the government they chose. Most of its ministers, even the prime-minister himself, publicly announced that their inclusion in the Cabinet was without their consent, and appalled as they were, refused to take part in it. In those circumstances Stefan Stambolov, then chairman of the National Assembly, with no effort out of the way and aided by provincial garrison troops loyal to the prince, succeeded in engineering a counter-coup which brought the prince back to Sofia. However, the Russian emperor's adamant will soon forced Battenberg to abdicate.

In the months remaining of 1886 and throughout 1887, the political crisis on the problem of elections for the new Bulgarian prince grew deeper. Fresh contradictions arose with greater intensity both on the Bulgarian domestic political scene and between the Great Powers in Europe. Having lost their clear vision of the situation in Bulgaria, the Russian politicians placed their adherents in the country in a rather difficult situation by nominating for the post the Caucasian prince Mingreli, a man known for his notorious reputation. The Great Powers were obviously against that candidature. Hurt Bulgarian nationalism decided to take a chance step and in July 1887, without the approval of Russia or Turkey, the National Assembly elected prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, a German aristocrat who had served in the Austrian army, as the prince of Bulgaria. France, Germany, Russia and Turkey declared the election illegal. Britain and Austria-Hungary supported the new Bulgarian prince, with some reservations though. In the meantime a new government was set up. Its prime minister Stefan Stambolov used his iron hand to smother the Russofile army and political opposition in the country.

The election of a prince and the emergence of a 'strong man' at the head of the government (Stefan Stambolov was known for his revolutionary past and for his determination at the time of the counter-coup) had the acute crisis attenuate. In spite of the still disturbing foreign political situation of Bulgaria the government managed to pay greater attention to its many internal problems in general and to the economy and the structural reform, in particular.

The Bulgaria liberated in 1878 and united in 1885 was a predominantly agricultural country. The war of 1876-1877 played the role of a bourgeois-democratic revolution as it brought about a redistribution of the land among the Bulgarian peasants. Lack of





capital did not allow the mass of small private farm owners to replace these immediately by modern farming, i.e. to take after the West European pattern using modern machines and technology, fertilizing etc. The process of land-concentration in large farms was rather slow and extended mainly to unbroken, though fertile lands, or to land purchased from departing Turks. The pattern of Bulgarian agriculture during that period, as well as throughout the next century up to the communist revolution in 1944, had been marked by the existence of small private landownership. This does not automatically mean that social equality had been pervading the Bulgarian villages all along. The situation of the petty landowners whose farming produce contributed the basic revenues to the state budget had been deteriorating due to various factors such as heavy state tax, usury practices, free trade and narrowing the home market within the principality borders.

*The first Bulgarian banknotes of 20 lev (1885) and 10 lev (1899) on the obverse; kept at the History of Sofia museum.*





Nevertheless, thanks to the millennial land-cultivating experience of the Bulgarian peasants, later farmers and to their enterprising skills, the country had been able to fully satisfy its needs for agricultural products and to accumulate considerable overstock, trained for export.

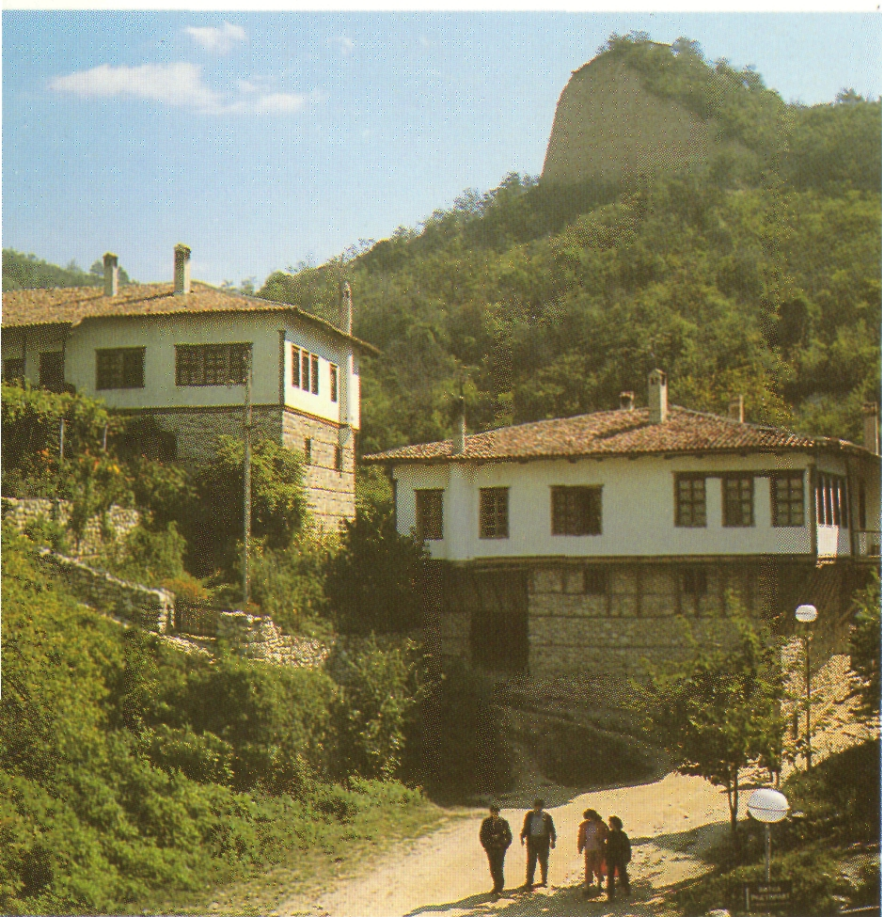
The internal political instability and the lack of any protectionist measures against the import of cheap industrial goods alienated the Bulgarian bourgeoisie from its intentions for investments in the country's industry. In those first years only a few dozens of factories had been built.

During its seven years in office, Stambolov's government (1887-1894) succeeded in laying the solid foundations of economic independence from the rest of the world. A package of laws sanctioned the construction of roads and railways, Bulgaria's independent legal, commercial and other contacts with foreign countries, the establishment of national institutions in education, culture and health services, etc. Having opened the door to foreign capital investments in Bulgaria, Stefan Stambolov did not hesitate to parallelly impose strict protection measures in favour of national production. Most of the governments which came after him took similar measures. The stimulation of industry gave perfect results. In less than quarter of a century industry, considerable for that time and for the scope of the country, had been developed. Bulgaria's gross national product significantly exceeded in volume the GNPs of all Balkan neighbouring countries which had been liberated some decades before it.

The main foreign political problem confronting Bulgaria throughout the period until World War I, was the fate of the Bulgarian population in Macedonia and Eastern (Edirne) Thrace that had remained under the rule of Turkey, despite its overwhelming majority. Successive Bulgarian governments had been fighting very hard to get the network of schools and churches improved, as well as the legal and economic status and living conditions of those Bulgarians more tolerable.

At the end of 19th century a group of Bulgarian intellectuals set up a secret Edirne-Macedonian Revolutionary Organization known as IMRO which began the preparation of an armed uprising in the regions still occupied by the Turks. Relying on nation-wide support on the part of the already liberated Bulgarian lands (the Principality of Bulgaria), IMRO got down to organizing a network of committees in Macedonia and Thrace after the pattern of Vassil Levski's revolutionary theory, as well as armed volunteer detachments which waged struggle against the Turkish feudal state machinery. Its culmination came when a mass armed uprising known in history as the Ilinden-Preobrajenie (its name coming from Transfiguration Day on which it broke) was raised in Macedonia and

*Melnik — town in SW Bulgaria with millennial history. Its population took part in the Kresna-Razlog uprising (1878-1879) and in the Ilinden-Preobrajenie insurrection (1903). Liberated from the Ottoman yoke by the cheta (detachment) of Yane Sandanski as late as 1912, it was included within the Bulgarian borders.*







Thrace in August 1900. Its aim was to incorporate those regions into Bulgaria, or at least to draw the attention of the Great Powers and make them advocate for the improvement of the living conditions for the population through legal and economic reforms. After three months of fierce battles the Turkish army crushed the uprising committing all customary cruelties and outrages over the peaceful population.

*The Rozhen monastery — refuge of Yane Sandanski, one of the leaders of the Edirne Macedonian revolutionary movement.*







## BULGARIA IN THE WARS FOR NATIONAL UNIFICATION

*Bulgaria Unified, lithographic picture in colour. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.*

*'Druzki' (the Bold) — Bulgarian torpedo boat merited for its successful operation against Turkish cruiser 'Hamidye' and thus contributed to the first victory of the Bulgarian Black Sea navy in the Balkan War (1912).*



Convinced that the issue of its territories and population which had remained under Turkey on the strength of the Berlin treaty could not be settled either through diplomatic channels or through a liberation uprising by the population itself, at the beginning of the 20 th century the Bulgarian ruling circles resolutely took up a military settlement-oriented course. At that time Bulgaria already had one of the best armies in Europe. It was well equipped with modern weapons, its troops well-disciplined and brought up for centuries to be prepared to fight for the liberation of their brethren still living in the Ottoman empire. There was one thing though, that made the Bulgarian politicians refrain from declaring war on Turkey and that was the incommensurably smaller recruitment and economic potentialities of Bulgaria at that time. In 1910, for example, its population of only 4,5 million was indeed beyond comparison with that of Turkey which was 25 million or nearly six times greater.

Bulgarian diplomacy had been trying very hard to find military and political allies for its country's inevitable affair of honour with the Ottoman empire. An internal crisis in Turkey in 1908 which resulted in the Young Turks' coming to the power, made the Bulgarians hurry. Taking advantage of the sultan's dethronement in that same year, Bulgaria declared its legal independence and became a kingdom. Up to that point, it had formally existed as an independent principality under the Ottoman empire's suzerainty.

At the turn of the twenties Bulgaria availed itself of Russia's intention to form a coalition with the Balkan states and had its policy focused on the establishment of a military and political alliance of the Balkan Christian states. Bulgaria was evidently well aware that it would not be able to wage a single fight against Turkey.

There were a good many wearisome difficulties ahead. The first one boiled down to the designation of the alliance. There was Russia which did not want a war with Turkey and insisted that the alliance be directed against Austria-Hungary. There was Bulgaria which demanded immediate hostilities against Turkey. Besides, Bulgaria had disagreements with two of its possible allies — Greece and Serbia, as to the division of Macedonia and Thrace. All three states claimed almost the same vast areas of the two territories in question. In that mad time-beating race, Bulgarian diplomacy made an unforgivable mistake by agreeing to come into alliance with Serbia and Greece without prior and clear accords on the controversial territorial question. It grossly blundered again by assenting to have





*Monumental ossuary on Srednogorets peak in the Rhodope mountain. During the Balkan Wars, in epical battles, reminiscent of the defence of Shipka peak, the 21st Srednogoriye regiment defeated Turkish army of Yaver pasha, superior both in numbers and armaments.*

all Bulgarian army forces engaged in combat in the immediate hinterland of the Turkish capital (it could be expected that all Turkish striking forces would be concentrated there). At the same time, the mutually-contended lands in Macedonia were left to the Serbian and the Greek armies to handle, and eventually to occupy.

War was declared in October 1912. The Bulgarian army launched extended frontal assaults against the Turkish capital. In only a few weeks the Bulgarian soldiers, inspired by and imbued with the sense of doing their duty for the liberation of their captive brethren, succeeded in defeating the Turkish army half a million-strong in epical battles at Lozengrad, Luleburgaz, Petra and Seliolu. The fortress of Edirne was besieged. The front-line Bulgarian army contingents reached as far as Chataldja — the last of the fortified defences to the Turkish capital. At this juncture scanty Bulgarian troops defeated the Turkish detachments in the Rhodopes and Aegian Thrace while others entered and freed Eastern Macedonia.

The Serbian and the Greek armies had to fight only part of the Turkish army 130 000-strong which was obviously easy to defeat. Then they went on to besiege the two major fortifications — at Yanina and at Skodra.

By the middle of December the Turks opted for armistice. Peace negotiations with the participation of all Great Powers were conducted in London under the British foreign minister as a moderator. The allies insisted that Turkey withdraw from all lands in Europe except the immediate hinterland of the Straits delimited by the Midye-Enez boundary-line.

Truce was shortlived due to Turkey's relentlessness. Hostilities were resumed and, after a perfect operation, the Bulgarian army seized the fortress of Edirne, despite its defence of garrison troops 60 000-strong. The Turks tried to go into a counter-offensive at Gelibolu (Gallipoli) peninsula but the attempt was abortive. The Turkish government wanted peace and agreed to cede the lands along the Midye-Enez border-line lest the Bulgarian troops capture the capital city of Istanbul.

This was the end of the First Balkan War. Its historic significance, viewed without bias, lies in the abolition of the last remnants of feudal oppression on the European continent. As for the Bulgarian people, it will be recorded in its history as a national unification war, or else as the end of its national liberation and bourgeois democratic revolution.

As soon as the war was over, the allies had to get on with the division of spoils, i.e. to divide among themselves the newly liberated territories either in virtue of their ethnic appurtenance, or on other preliminarily agreed principle. Having occupied contested and not so contested zones, neither Serbia nor Greece had any intentions to that end. The two governments used the press, parliament



and diplomatic circles as their mouthpiece to announce the principle they had opted for: each of the allies shall possess the territories its army occupied during the war. The Bulgarian army though, had carried the heaviest burden of the war by having fought almost against the whole of the Turkish army concentrated in narrow operational fields, while the other allies had been able to occupy, almost without any fighting, Macedonia — a Bulgarian-inhabited territory.

At that moment neither the monarch whom the National Assembly had empowered as a commander-in-chief, nor the general staff demonstrated any sagacity or prudence. Rather than resorting to possible diplomatic combinations (Greece and Serbia were also entangled in bilateral territorial argument), or seeking the Great Powers' moderatorship, they chose the course of no-compromise, i.e. of confrontation and military threat. This was more than welcome for Serbia and Greece which instantly entered into a military alliance against Bulgaria. As a matter of fact, their forces were less efficient than the Bulgarians', but they had good hopes that Turkey and Romania would also get involved in a possible military conflict, the former for reasons of seeking a partial revenge, and the latter for reasons of getting 'compensations' for previously upset balance of forces.

The Second Balkan War broke out on 16 June 1913. This time, the *casus belli* was an armed incident instigated by a personal order of the Bulgarian monarch. The Serbian and the Greek troops attacked the Bulgarian armies. After a few days of disarray and partial retreat, the Bulgarian troops defeated the Serbians at Bregalnitsa and besieged the Greeks in Kresna gorge.

It was exactly at that point that Romania and Turkey entered the war. Without encountering any resistance as there were no Bulgarian troops against them, the Romanian divisions occupied northern Bulgaria while the Turks were seeing to the occupation of eastern Thrace. Bulgaria was bayoneted into asking for peace.

A peace treaty was signed in August 1913. It was nothing but an unjust dictate. The country which had born the brunt of the war with Turkey received only territorial leavings: it gained small sections of Thrace and Macedonia but lost part of Dobrudja, the once detached Bulgarian territory now given to Romania. Two million Bulgarians which was one third of the total Bulgarian people, were to remain again under foreign rule.

The results of the Second Balkan (Internally) War predetermined Bulgaria's participation in the First World War which broke out in 1914. During the first year of the war, Bulgaria maintained neutrality trying to find out which of the two opposing sides could offer a Bulgarian interest-friendly settlement of the problem of its territories lost to the other Balkan states. Serbia, Romania and

The Alexander Nevsky Memorial church in Sofia, erected as a symbol of the victory of Christianity over Islam. After decision was taken by the Assembly at Turnovo in 1879, its architectural design was finished in 1898 and the cathedral was eventually built between 1904 and 1912.





Greece, swinging towards the Entente and their governments showing relenlessness, significantly impeded British, French and Russian diplomacy propose a solution acceptable to the Bulgarians.

In the last reckoning, they were awake to the serious danger of the Bulgarian huge and efficient army's involvement on the side of the Central Powers, i.e. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey (at that time it was indeed capable of defeating the Entente's southern flank, and what is more important, of allowing the establishment of the unavailable until then territorial link between the Central Powers). The Entente offered Bulgaria nothing more than leavings of territories in Turkish Thrace and their deigning to assist in its settling territorial problems with the other Christian Balkan states as soon as the war ended. However, the Bulgarian politicians' recent past bitter experiences of promises for 'benovolent assistance' made them react with scepticism and reticence to the proposals of the Entente.

At the same time the Central Powers were too profuse of promises: if Bulgaria chose to participate on their side, it would receive all territories aspired for by the Bulgarians, even bonus lands, which they had never claimed.

Under these circumstances, the Bulgarian political minds would be expected to make sober analyses of the two sides' chances of winning the war. Even a passing glance at the geopolitical situation, the raw material resources, the economic and human potentialities clearly showed that Austria-Hungary, Germany and Turkey had no strategically-justified vistas of being on the eve of victory over the bloc of the Great western democracies plus Russia and Japan, which actually had at that time all the resources of the world at their beck and call. Having succumbed to emotions and having forgotten about their making a cool judgement, the monarch and the ruling circles joined the Central Powers and, in the autumn of 1915 attacked Serbia, an ally of the Entente. The Serbian army was literally mown down just in a few days. The Bulgarians were on the march to Thessaloniki, sweeping away on passing, the French and British divisions which had come to Serbia's aid. The fate of Thesaloniki — the Entente base on the Balkans — seemed to have been decided. However, the Supreme German command had not been very keen on closing the Balkan front as it diverted a million of Entente soldiers from possible engagement in fighting against the Germans on the Western front. The advance of the Bulgarian army was then stopped by the Germans under the pretext of keeping the neutrality of Greece, which, by the way, was broken by the Entente long before that. A front line stretching from Albania to Aegian Thrace was set up. There, in the course of three years the Bulgarians were forced into waging wearisome positional warfare against the better armed and better equipped British and

*Cutting Across the Morava River. Artist Dimitur Gyudjenov; 1916.*







French troops, aided by the Greek army which joined them in 1917.

In the autumn of 1916 Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente. The Bulgarian military command could afford throwing against the Romanians only one of its armies — the famous Third army. The soldiers and the officers, however, clearly saw this battle as fighting for the liberation of their compatriots in Dobrudja, the section of Bulgaria taken only three years before. They made wonders in a series of military exploits. Both the Romanian army and the several Russian divisions which came to its assistance took only two months to be defeated. In the beginning of December, divisions of the Third Bulgarian army invaded Bucharest, the Romanian capital, in the company of several German units. Having advanced to the northeast, Third army divisions opened a positional front against the Russian army along the Seret river.

Germany and Austria-Hungary, however, had their resources

*Joseph I the Exarch (1840-1915). At the head of the Bulgarian Exarchate since 1877 until his death, he has greatly contributed to its consolidation as a mainstay of the Bulgarian lands, remaining under Turkish rule.*



gradually drained. The industrial enterprises in Bulgaria had almost stopped work due to raw materials and energy shortages. Agriculture had lost its draught animals which had been requisitioned for the needs of the army. Farming had no male work force as it had all been mobilized in the army. In that war Bulgaria, with a population of about five million, mobilized 900 000 men — the highest percentage of the available male population, compared with the other countries in the hostilities. Food production dropped down and days of famine set in. The intolerable scarcity and the corrupt easy profiteering ruling circles were the cause of mass popular discontent both in the back areas and on the frontline. Social stress was perilously building up.

The outbreak of the socialist revolution in Russia and the Bolshevik ideas for peace and social change were gaining certain popularity among the Bulgarian workers and farmers. The crisis-ridden society was threatening to rise in a powerful revolution.

The explosion took place in September 1918. The forces of the Entente launched two assaults against the Thessaloniki front, at Doiran and Dobro Pole. Their intention was to have the two advancing armies first break through the Bulgarian defence lines and then, once in the rear, join together to encircle the whole Bulgarian army. The forces of the Entente succeeded in breaking through the Bulgarian front at Dobro Pole and in slowly taking the offensive. At Doiran, however, the Bulgarian army defeated completely oncoming British and Greek troops. The commander of the Bulgarian troops at that section of the front even demanded that he be given orders for a counter-offensive and a line of its advance — Thessaloniki.

At this juncture, however, the troops in Macedonia refused to obey the orders of the command. A spontaneous mutiny burst forth. Without surrendering or permitting to be encircled by the Entente army, the Bulgarian divisions headed for Sofia to square accounts with the monarch and the ruling government, who were thought to be at the bottom of the war. On 25 September 1918 uncontrollable soldiers' masses seized the headquarters in Radomir and began preparing for the main blow at Sofia.

The frightened monarch and the panic-stricken government released the Agrarian party leaders Alexander Stamboliski and Raiko Daskalov from prison and sent them to the mutineers' camp, counting on their popularity and reposing hopes in their appeasing the mutinous soldiers' masses. Stamboliski and Daskalov, however, had something else on their mind. They intended to canalize the energies of the mutiny and to add to it clear political zest and ultimate goal — the overthrow of monarchy. They addressed the party of the 'narrow' socialists with concrete proposals for joint actions to that end. The socialists, though,

*Turks Retreating at Luleburgaz (fragment). Artist Yaroslav Veshin.*







turned the Agrarian party proposals down.

The Agrarian leaders displayed greater determination. On 27 September 1918 they stood at the head of the mutiny, proclaimed Bulgaria a republic and declared the monarchy overthrow. On 29 September 1918 the mutineers' masses advanced towards Sofia. Feeling fatigued and being poorly organized, the soldiers failed to break through the defences of Sofia, composed of units obsequious to the government, and of German divisions. The mutiny was suppressed on October 2.

In the meantime, the government sought truce with the Entente. An armistice was concluded in Thessaloniki on 29 September 1918. Its terms dictated withdrawal of the Bulgarian army to its pre-war positions and occupation of strategically important zones.

This was the second national catastrophe since 1913, during the reign of the absolute monarch Ferdinand (1912-1918). That was clearly more than enough to force the culprit to abdicate and leave the country for good on 3 October 1918. His son, Boris III, ascended the Bulgarian throne. Bulgaria saw the disastrous outcome of the war in black and white when a treaty of peace was signed in the Paris suburb of Neuille in November 1919. The country suffered further territorial amputations in favour of its neighbours: the loss of fertile Aegean Thrace and of access to the Aegean Sea to Greece was the heaviest of all. Besides this Bulgaria was liable to payment of enormous reparations that would be back-breaking even for any big and economically advanced European country. On the basis of the treaty of Neuille, Bulgaria was to abolish its military service and to maintain only voluntary units not exceeding 30 000 men. It also had to submit the better part of its draught animals and its energy sources to the hands of the Entente. Defeated, humiliated and burdened with heavy bonded debt, Bulgaria was brought down to the lowest point in its post-Liberation development.

*Meanders of the River Cherna. Artist Symeon Velkov.*







## POST-WAR CRISIS 1918-1925

After the First World War, the Bulgarian society lapsed in deep crisis. The crippling wars had resulted not only in territorial losses but also in economic ruin, psychological loss of faith and ultimately, of genuine trust in the future prospects of the country. The struggle for the unification of all Bulgarian inhabited lands, which had invariably been the main task facing the Bulgarian society after 1878, and which had taken enormous intellectual efforts and all other resources of the country, ended in an utter defeat unheard of in all Bulgarian history. The Bulgarians were confronted with all the complexities of the question 'Which way to take now?'. Their small defeated country, which had been subjected to ruthless treatment by both the European Great Powers and its Balkan neighbours, was at loss. It had to choose between reconciling itself with the defeat and unconditionally sticking to its heavy obligations under the peace treaty on one side, or continually delving into the past of enmity and serving the 'bad blood' feeling, hoping for a revenge at the opportune moment, on the other. If Bulgaria, with its paltry, even contemptible potentialities and its international isolation was to take either of these courses at that moment, it stood no other chance but only more ruin staring it in the face.

The crisis did not have only economic and psychological dimensions. The country also was in the grip of serious crisis of confidence in the traditional political institutions — the monarchy, the bourgeois parties, the Parliament and the system of government. Some of the bourgeois political groups which used to enjoy certain popularity before the treaty of Neuille, had now lost it completely. Their electorate had dwindled to nothing. Political life was quickly turning to radicalism. Two parties, marginal until then, came up the political stage — the Bulgarian People's Agrarian Union (BPAU) and the Bulgarian Social-Democratic party, which changed its name to Bulgarian Communist party in 1919. At the elections in 1919 the predominating part of the electorate voted for the Agrarian party candidates. The Bulgarian Communist party came second.

The BPAU came to power in 1920 and had three years in office. Its rule was one of the most interesting phenomena in the European post-war political period. For it made a political attempt at finding an unconventional way out of the heavy crisis which had befallen the defeated countries but had also affected the other parties to the world conflict.

The ideology of the BPAU was a system of views typical of the

*The Mutiny in 1918 fragment. Artist Iliya Petrov.*

*Shepherds Near Brezovo; painted in 1941. Artist Zlatyo Boyadjiev; National Art Galery in Sofia.*







*Hotel Odeon in Sofia, now called Edelweiss. Built in 1923, as one of the numerous hotels, residential buildings and shops erected under a large which were housing construction scheme, designed to cope with post-World War I housing crisis.*



European petty bourgeois doctrines. Its hopes were centred on moderate reforms which were to secure the existence of lower and middle class proprietors. Complying with this formulation, the Agrarian government undertook relevant legislative measures which affected the interests of the bourgeoisie, laid restrictions on big business and encouraged small holders enterprise.

BPAU pursued a policy of bringing discredit on the bourgeois parties once and for all. In its views these were lacking in mass social support and their leaders were to blame for the national catastrophes in the wars. Many of them were indeed tried and sent to prison. The policy of destroying the brain-centres of the bourgeois parties and of exerting constant pressure on them, was not always implemented by democratic methods. This gave ground for the agrarian government to be accused of totalitarianism.

The agrarian politicians' attitude towards their natural ally, the communist party, was rather inconsistent. They did realise that only the communists could offer them support at a crucial moment; they often carried out joint actions aiming at the settlement of the political problems of the day. At the same time, however, viewing the communists as their most dangerous rival in the battle for power, the agrarians subjected their activities to pressure, even to repression, too.

The organisation of the Bulgarians exiled from their native country and now living in Macedonia and Thrace, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) had resumed its activity during the first years after the war. The absence of sufficient regular army made it possible for the armed detachments of the IMRO to get full control over the Pirin area (the small part of Macedonia that had remained in Bulgaria) and increasingly interfered in the country's political life. The stand of the organisation as officially proclaimed, was that it was not interested in the policies of governments in Sofia with the exception of one single point — their attitude to the lands and the fate of the Macedonian Bulgarians. The organisation also proclaimed that it would fight against any government which, in its foreign policy, would undertake steps adverse to the national aspirations in Macedonia and Thrace. A captive to its own conceptions which, to a large degree, disregarded the realities in post-war European political life, the place and the potentialities of Bulgaria, in particular the IMRO, along with its heroic struggle against the Serbian invaders in Yugoslav Macedonia, killed quite needlessly a number of activists of various political trends in Bulgaria, as well as some of their own followers.

The lack of strong unity of action between the BPAU and the Bulgarian Communist party (BCP) made it possible for some of the tottery traditional political parties to unite in a political organisation called the Popular entente. At that time, another force, the League





of reserve officers came into being. This was an organization of few still active and many thousands of unemployed officers. On the night of the 8th of June 1923 the army, which was supportive of these political elements, overthrew the agrarians. The prime-minister, Alexander Stambolisky was assassinated with utmost brutality.

It was beyond the powers of the small Bulgarian army to cope with possible rural upheavals. Indeed, the Agrarian party organisations in some of the bigger centres in the country rose in armed struggle against the coup perpetrators and their government, composed of representatives of the bourgeois parties in the Popular entente. Under these circumstances, the communists' position on the situation was to decide the outcome. The BCP set up a strong military organisation. It was well supplied with arms by BCP followers within the barracks. The BCP was admitted to the Communist International (the Comintern) and, unlike the party of the agrarians,

*All Souls' Day; 1927. Artist Pencho Georgiev; kept at the City Art Gallery in Sofia.*



was already in the grip of the notorious communist iron discipline. Its leadership in Bulgaria, however, declared the coup as replacement of one military dictatorship — that of the rural bourgeoisie and their 'posse comitatus', with another — that of the urban upper middle class. This attitude turned out to be fatal to agrarians and communists in Bulgaria alike, as it enabled the men of the coup to oust them one by one. Having suppressed the June uprising of the agrarians, the government undertook mass repressions against the communist party, too. Conscious of its error and pressurized by the Comintern, the BCP leadership took a decision in August to foment an armed uprising in conjunction with the BPAU, no later than September 1923. The very short time for preparation did not permit to establish an all-round united front. On the eve of the uprising the government found out about its plans and subjected the communists to mass arrests. This was a severe blow on the whole organisation. On the night of the 22nd to the 23rd the uprising broke out in some odd regions in the country, but it was quickly suppressed by government detachments. The rebellious areas were drowned in blood. Thousands of Bulgarians — BPAU supporters and, especially, BCP followers, were killed without charge or trial.

The international position of the Popular entente government grew rather unstable due to a wave of indignation at its outrage which had gripped Europe. The guerilla movement in Bulgaria, organised by the communists and the agrarians and some of the government allies falling away from it (e.g. the IMRO which could not forgive its conciliation policy towards Yugoslavia), destabilized the domestic situation of the government, too. The BCP thought it the right time to confirm its course of armed struggle as still valid in 1924.

In this situation of 'white-collar' terrorism, the BCP military league, composed mainly of reserve army officers, embarked on counter-terrorism. Dozens of political and military figures — parties to the coup, were murdered and an abortive attempt to assassinate tsar Boris III was made, too.

On 16 April 1925, taking advantage of the whole government and military ruling top gathering at the 'St. Nedelya' church for the funeral of a murdered general, the BCP underground military league engineered a bomb explosion, counting on the elimination of the ruling political kernel at one go. Dozens of innocent people got killed but, by some miracle, the rulers remained sound in life and limb in the only unscathed part of the church. The general public resentment at the drastic bomb outrage was used by the government as a long-looked-for cause for capital retribution with regard to all opposition forces. Special task packs of officers massacred thousands of Bulgarians without charge or trial and the victims were not only members of the BCP and BPAU but also

*Fountain of the Revival period in downtown of Sandanski, Blagoevgrad region. At the end of World War I (1914-1918) when Bulgaria lost southern Thrace and its outlet on the Aegean Sea, Bulgarian patriots transferred it from the town of Seir (present-day Seres in Greece).*







thousands of intellectuals having nothing to do with the political parties, such as academics, writers, poets and journalists. Those events gave rise to a new wave of discontent in democratic Europe.

*St Nedelya church in Sofia. On 16 April 1925 it became scene of a plot against the top ruling crust, the bomb explosion took 160 innocent lives.*



ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΙΟ

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ

ΜΩΥΣΗ

ΠΑΤΕΡ



ΙΑΚΩΒΟΣ

ΠΕΤΡΟΣ

ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ



ЗА ВѢЧНУ ПАМЯТЬ АТАНАСІИ И СΥΝΟΡΓΑΤΑΜΕΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΧΕΙΡΟΤΟΝΟΥ. 1907. Δ. Ν.



## BULGARIA IN THE INTERIM BETWEEN BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY AND FASCISM 1925-1944

A period of stability, even of certain uplift of the Bulgarian economy, set in after 1925. This was a reflex conditioned by the revival of the world economy. The existing industry had its technology modernised while the power-generating one had its output increased. Agricultural production marked a significant progress. Along with the traditional horticultural and grain crops, some industrial crops — oleaginous seeds, sugar-beet root, etc., were broadly introduced and cultivated. These provided raw materials for the well-developed Bulgarian processing industry, as well as goods for competitive exports. Step by step, the development of industry and of cultivated (arable) lands were doing away with the refugee problem that had been a heavy burden on the Bulgarian society. By the end of the war about 300 000 Bulgarians from Macedonia, Thrace, Dobrudja and the Western outlying territories had emigrated to Bulgaria.

The consolidation of the economy took the edge off the nagging social contradictions. According to the Comintern stipulations, there was no longer a revolutionary situation in Bulgaria and the Communist party, once outlawed by the Popular entente government, had to revoke its armed struggle course of 1925. The tense atmosphere of terrorism gradually calmed down.

In the period until the beginning of World War II, the traditional bourgeois-democratic system was seen to plunge into a deep crisis. There were two main reasons for that state of the internal political life in the country. The traditional bourgeois parties were deprived of mass social support and this was the result of their incompetent government at the time of the national unification wars, their utter corruption especially in the higher party ranks and their policy of atrocities during the 'white-collar' terrorism period (1923-1925). The two parties, which used to enjoy the greatest popular support among the Bulgarian electorate in the recent past, (the BCP and the BPAU) had also sunk in a serious crisis. The Agrarian party disintegrated into several factions, now at enmity with each other, now in temporary unions formed to *ad hoc* or short-term ends. The status of the BCP was far more complicated. Banned by virtue of the so-called State Security Protection Act, specially adopted by the National Assembly, it finally managed to resume its activity in 1927. Then it registered itself under a new name — Bulgarian Workers' party. Fulfilling the instructions of the Communist International with unquestioning obedience (the latter was then the captive of ultra-

*Preobrajenie (Transfiguration Day), 1907. Painting in the tradition of the Bansko School of Art.*

*Monastery Gates, 1941. Artist Danail Dechev; now at the National Art Gallery in Sofia.*





leftist sectarianism), the BWP tried to foist forms of struggle, inadequate to the situation in the country. That, too, caused additional confusion and further withdrawal of the electorate. Even so, in the general elections held at that time, tens of thousands of people cast their ballot for the BWP and, subsequently, helped it win the municipal elections in Sofia in 1932.

The difficulty for any of the bourgeois parties in attaining the leading position lay in their finding it impossible to make any serious progress on foreign political issues such as the settlement of the burning problem for the Bulgarian people — the Neuille treaty. Its annulment or, at least, its revision including remission of the colossal reparations, recognition and regulation of the rights and freedoms due to the Bulgarian minorities in the neighbouring Balkan countries and problems alike, would have been equivalent to healing the Bulgarian running wound. Bulgaria's Balkan neighbours, however, had already formed a strong bloc with the victorious Great Powers and were rejecting every attempt for detente, as well as any Bulgarian justified requests, even those for palliative measures with regard to the vital issues of their relations.

The political parties, rent and split by internal strife, had gradually become simple associations of groups of people, lacking in principle and having just one aim — to climb to power in order to participate in the criminal sharing out of the country's budget resources.

In the beginning of the thirties, the crisis led to a disheartening lack of faith in all democratic state institutions. The attempts to find an outcome of the crisis by parliamentary means gave no results at all. The alignment of parties, the so-called Popular bloc which, in 1931, succeeded in overthrowing the utterly discredited group of parties in the Popular entente, embarked on both internal and foreign policies, conducted with the same methods. This inevitably led to identical results. Therefore, it was only natural that certain social forces tried to break the dead-lock by resorting to ways and means uncustomary to the traditional ones, known to be used under democracy.

At that period of history, one of those ways was obviously the totalitarian fascist dictatorship. Its operation in Italy and Germany had been followed closely by the Bulgarian public. It did credit to the Bulgarian people, whose deep-rooted democratic spirit could hardly be denied, that the fascist ideology never became entrenched in the country. As a matter of fact, Bulgaria had witnessed the establishment of not only one, but of several fascist 'parties'. Their membership though, ranged from just a few to few dozens and their *fuehrers'* contentions and public appearances in the 30s had charged with great inspiration only the cartoonists, working for the comic and satirical columns of the press.



The crisis of confidence in the values of traditional democracy was the reason for the emergence of a new political force on the Bulgarian political stage of the 30s — the ideological circle *Zveno* (link). It also drew its adherents from the army. Their ideas rejected the existence of the traditional multi-party system. According to them, it had already run out of any potential for efficiently administering the affairs of the country. They also considered that in the new conditions and in the situation which had arisen on the domestic political scene, the government should be taken over by the economic and intellectual elite not connected in any way with the political parties in disrepute. The *Zveno* group united in the belief that social peace should be the alternative as opposed to the communist theory of inevitable class struggle.

Although the *Zveno* ideological and political group was an advocate of strong totalitarian institutions (even authoritarian at the beginning and then politically non-aligned) and rejected democracy as a system of statecraft, it was not a fascist organisation. It had none of the views incorporated in the fascist doctrine, nor nationalistic and racial outlook. It did not strive at organising a mass movement as an instrument in securing strong and lasting political support for its philosophy. The ideas of that group were more of a typical political amateurishness manifested by some officers who, on the whole, had genuinely been concerned about the future of their country.

On 19 May 1934, in association with the Reserve officers league, the *Zveno* group engineered a coup d'état. Its government headed by Kimon Georgiev, suspended the constitution, dismissed the National assembly, prohibited and dissolved the political parties, and undertook a number of reforms which had been designed to optimize the state-bureaucratic machinery. The IMRO, one of the main obstacles to the improvement of relations with the neighbour-

*Harbour, 1939. Artist Mara Tsoncheva; kept at the National Art Gallery in Sofia.*





ing countries, was suppressed. In attempting to lead Bulgaria out of its international isolation, the new government established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, improved its relations with western democracies (France and Britain) and made efforts for normalization of the relations with Yugoslavia. Confirmed republicans as they were, the *Zveno* government undertook a series of steps challenging the position of the monarch.

In the management of the economy, the *Zveno* group concepts which had been enforced by relevant legislation, laid emphasis on extensive state control at the expense of considerably limited private enterprise. Their policy of protectionism extended to the co-operatives, the state monopoly on key production and the state banks. These policies brought about some economic progress, but they also put the *Zveno* government down in the bad books of the upper middle-class.

*Old Plovdiv in 1938. Artist Tsanko Lavrenov.*





Thus, the *Zveno* government took only a few months in office to antagonize the upper middle-class, the traditional parties, the communists and the monarch. Lacking in noticeable popular support, it fell an easy prey to the military, loyal to tsar Boris III. It was one of those military groups that forced the prime-minister Kimon Georgiev to resign in January 1935. A new government, loyal to the palace was formed.

In those years tsar Boris III's ideas of the monarch assuming executive authority had taken shape. Worried about the fate of his dynasty and convinced of both the old parties' and the new 'high-minded' circles' incapacity to make provision for its future, the monarch resorted to an elaborate political plan and, similar to his first experience in unseating Kimon Georgiev's government, succeeded in gradually ousting *Zveno* from the political stage before the beginning of World War II. The sovereign did not naturally have the slightest intention of restoring the constitutional parliamentary system. It was not easy for him to repeal the Constitution of Turnovo either, as the Bulgarian society, having been deprived of its good old aristocracy and of its elite spiritual guides for nearly six hundred years in a row, had been organically sensitive and ill-disposed to any authoritarian power. Even at the time of the wars, the Bulgarian monarchy had its prerogatives over the government strictly limited. Because of that, tsar Boris III got his diligently elaborated political plan going, resorting to expedient elements of social demagoguery such as holding out promises for elections, implanting fear of the future (the timing of this threat was well-calculated as the prelude to the Second World War was already apparent) and engineering campaigns against the incompetence of the conventional bourgeois state machinery. In this way he succeeded in pronouncing himself to be the only rallying figure for the Bulgarian people and their aspirations in those hard times of grave political crisis. It should be admitted that the royal propaganda was a success. Tired of butchery and inter plus intra-party rough-and-tumble, the Bulgarian society consented to the dictatorship and accepted the monarch as the monocratic political guide of the nation. Thus, from 1936 until his death, only formally, tsar Boris III shepherded the country almost single-handedly, aided by care-taker governments whose loyalty to him, personally, was beyond any doubt.



*Most of the buildings constructed during the first half of the 20th century had their facades decorated with figurative plastics, meant to intensify their monumental impact.*







## BULGARIA DURING WORLD WAR II

Upon the outbreak of World War II the Bulgarian government declared neutrality. Unlike in the case of the analogous step at beginning of World War I, this time the monarch and the ruling circles seemed determined to observe it. The lessons of the previous world war were too bitter to forget and there were no guarantees at all, as to the outcome of the new one. At the same time, Sofia was quite clear that the geopolitical position of the country would inevitably lead to strong pressure on Bulgaria for its involvement on the side of one of the belligerent powers and followed, in agonizing suspense, the intricate diplomatic manoeuvring, which was being acted out around the Balkan stage. Despite its newly reconstructed troops Bulgaria was aware that their strength and their arms would not be enough to guarantee the security of the country, less so the attainment of the 'national ideals' — the restitution of the Bulgarian territories lost in 1913 and in 1918.

In the autumn of 1940, with the approval of all Great Powers, Bulgaria succeeded in retrieving, through negotiations, southern Dobrudja, which had been lost to Romania in 1913. This fostered an illusion that the territorial problem could be settled without Bulgaria's indispensable involvement in the fresh world conflict.

This illusion was soon blighted when the German Reich expansion reached the Bulgarian borders. Faced with choosing between military confrontation with Germany and accession to the Axis powers, the monarch and his government had Bulgaria join the fascist bloc on 1 March 1941. The public opposition to this decision was rather weak and this reaction was determined by one main psychological factor: the Soviet Union, which most Bulgarians used to identify with Russia — the country they had traditional liking for, had signed a friendship and non-aggression pact with nazi Germany.

By the middle of 1941 the official propaganda had quite a lot to its credit — war with Germany averted, all lost territories successfully retroceded, following the Greeks and Yugoslavs surrendering under the jackboot of the *Wehrmacht* without a single drop of Bulgarian blood and, last but not least, official relations with the USSR maintained even after its invasion by nazi Germany on 22 June 1941.

Even when the German aggression against the Soviet Union was already a fact, the Bulgarian monarch and his government continued to observe, before the public eye, their previously declared

*Winter in Plovdiv; 1939. Artist Zlatyo Boyadjiev; kept at the National Art Gallery in Sofia.*

*The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Built in 1892, it is one of the numerous examples of the great influence of late 19th century European architecture on the construction of public buildings in Bulgaria.*







*The first state printing house in Sofia (1882-1983). Destroyed during air-raids in World War II, it was later restored and subsequently renovated to become an art Gallery. Today it accommodates the remarkable collections of the Gallery for International Art at the St. st. Cyril and Methodius Foundation.*

passivity course. This meant that Bulgaria would undertake to fulfil any assignments by the Axis only when it had tried all possible ways and means of declining them. As a matter of fact, Bulgaria was the only country in the Axis bloc whose ruling circles had firmly withheld their consent to the dispatch of even one single soldier to either the Eastern or any of the other fronts in the West. At the end of 1941, however, Bulgaria declared a 'token' war on the USA and Britain which was quickly turned into real combat by the Anglo-American aircraft. By 1943 the British and American bomber squadrons, known as 'flying fortresses', dumped their deadly load over Sofia and other Bulgarian towns time and again. The country's economy was set to work only for the German machinery of war. All roads, communications, airports and ports were placed at the *Wehrmacht's* disposal.

The Soviet Union and the United States, drifting into the war on the side of the anti-fascist bloc, put an end to all doubt as to the issue of the world conflict. The apparition of fresh national catastrophe was irresistably acquiring distinct outlines. At this distressing historical juncture the BCP, acting on Stalin's instructions, took up initiatives defying the official administration. In this, it was undoubtedly aided by the confusion and passivity, which had taken hold of the good old parties associated with the rule of democracy.

As early as 26 June 1941, the BCP embarked upon a course of armed struggle against the monarchist government and its German allies. Mass guerilla movement grew apace throughout the country. The guerillas got down to destroying the statecraft infrastructure, the German military objectives in Bulgaria and the industry, contributing its output to the *Wehrmacht*. Bulgaria, once again, became the only country in the fascist bloc which had allowed armed resistance to unfold. It was obviously not of the proportions known for the guerilla movements in the other German occupied countries in Europe.

With respect to political initiatives, in the middle of 1942 the BCP put forward the Comintern idea of 1935 of a united front (in Bulgaria it was called Fatherland front). It was meant to unite all democratic forces fighting against the government, which had committed the country to nazi Germany. The initial waverings of the leaders of the senior democratic parties had soon been overcome by the war taking a favourable turn, especially after the major allied victories at Stalingrad, Kursk, El Alamein, and in southern Italy. In August 1943 the BCP, the BPAU left wing, the left social democrats and the Zveno political group all joined in the Fatherland front. August also brought tidings of the death of tsar Boris III, the figure unifying all absolute monarchy-supporting forces. The heir to the throne, Symeon II, had not yet come of age and the throne was taken by a regency. The Bulgarian germanophile bourgeoisie,



bewildered and precarious as it could be, was unable to suggest an outcome of the crisis and was desperately groping for palliative let's-patch-up-the-situation answers to its problems, ranging from vague promises for democratization of political life at home to indecisive attempts at being in contact with the allies.

In the summer of 1944 the Soviet army was approaching the Balkan Peninsula. In August the strong nazi force in the vicinity of Iassi-Kishinev was encircled and defeated. On 23 August 1944 Romania quit the fascist bloc and declared war on Germany. Tanks with the red five-pointed star branded on them, loomed up before hushed Bulgarian patrols on sentry-go up in Dobrudja.

Through force of circumstances three days later, on 26 August 1944 the Central committee of the Bulgarian communist party (CC of BCP) took a decision to rise an armed revolt in conjunction with the other political parties and groups in the Fatherland front. Thereafter events developed at breakneck speed. A new government, composed of right-wing agrarians, democrats and populists was appointed on 2 September — the last attempts of the ruling bourgeois top crust which was desperately trying to keep its power through cosmetic cabinet reshuffles. The Fatherland front withheld its support from the new government.

On September 5, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria and on September 8, the Red army invaded the territory of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian army had been ordered to offer no resistance. The Russians occupied the northeastern end of the country and its two major harbours — Varna and Burgas. In this situation, on the eve of September 9, Sofia garrison detachments under the command of Zveno-supporting officers, acting under orders of the Fatherland front, entered strategic key-points in Sofia, overthrew the government and placed the ministers under arrest. On September 9, an announcement was made that a government of the Fatherland

*The Brickyard at Limen (1943-1944).  
Artist Kiril Tsonev; National Art Gallery  
in Sofia.*





front with Kimon Georgiev as prime-minister had been installed in power.

At first, Kimon Georgiev's government had no particular problems on the domestic political front. It had no difficulty in establishing its rule and order all over the country with the help of the Zveno-infiltrated military and the guerilla detachments set up by the BCP. The presence of the Soviet Red army in some parts of the country had a disheartening impact on most of the former regime supporters. The foreign political situation of the country was far more complex. On September 10, the Fatherland front government declared war on Germany and its allies.

Nazi Germany hastily sent small divisions to invade Bulgaria at several points of entry but these were quickly repulsed. The Bulgarian army divisions stationed in Macedonia found themselves in a much more difficult situation. German troops had closed round them, while their command was being nonplussed by the high treason of some staff officers who had deserted to the German side. By contrast with an analogical situation involving Italian troops on the Balkans the year before, the Bulgarian divisions did not surrender but fought their way back to the old Bulgarian borders. The Bulgarian air units gained special distinction in this operation. Flying the five hundred war-planes ready to hand, the Bulgarian eagles were making hundreds of sorties a day. Their massive air-raids eventually succeeded in crippling the German forces on that front.

In the beginning of September three Bulgarian armies — the First, the Second and the Fourth, in total some 500 000-strong, launched an offensive against Yugoslavia in two lines of advance — Sofia-Nis and Sofia-Skopje. The Supreme command assigned them the strategic task to block the way of the German troops withdrawing from Greece. Within a month the Bulgarian army, at the price of thousands sacrificing their lives, succeeded in liberating Macedonia, southern and eastern Serbia. The German troops which had been cut off in Greece, gave themselves up to the British. First Bulgarian army 130 000-strong, continued on its march to Hungary. There, between 6 and 19 March 1945, it engaged in epic battles; it drove off the Germans attempting to launch a counter-offensive and then, went on the offensive itself. By April 1945 First Bulgarian army had entered the territory of Austria. On the day of the capitulation of nazi Germany, it liberated the town of Klagenfurt. There, the soldiers of First Bulgarian Army and the British Eighth Army established contact. The Bulgarian-British encounter at this Austrian 'Elbe' was marked by a friendly football match between the two army teams which drew one all.

The participation of the Bulgarian armies in the final stage of World War II and the excellent performance of their extremely efficient live force against the Germans and their Hungarian, Croatian

*Bulgarian Madonna; 1940. Artist Vassil Stoilov; now at the National Art Gallery in Sofia.*







and Albanian allies, improved considerably the international image of the country. This enabled Bulgaria to live at greater ease to see the peace conference at which it would no longer be looked upon as an ordinary satellite to the fascist bloc. Sure enough the Paris treaty of peace which was signed in 1946, made provision for the territorial integrity of Bulgaria within its borders of 1939 and acknowledged the annexation of Dobrudja of 1940.

*St Sophia church (fifth century AD) and the Unknown Warrior Tomb in Sofia.*







## ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS IN THE BULGARIAN LANDS

*The treasure of Rogozen; with its 165 gilt-decorated silver vessels weighing a total of 20 kg, it is the most abundant Thracian find unearthed in Bulgaria ever; sixth century AD.*

*Bronze coin showing Thracian ruler Sevtum III on horseback; IV-III millennium BC; National Museum of History.*

*Marble bas-relief from Messembria, Burgas region; shown are all nine city strategos (generals) at religious ceremony in the shrine of Hecate; first century BC.*



The ancient civilization in the Bulgarian lands is usually associated with the culture of the Thracians. In its centuries long history that people, 'the second greatest in the world after the Indians' in Herodotus's words, had not created any culture in a written form. On this account the spiritual make-up of the Thracian cultural heritage should be sought after by a careful study of the available evidence of Thracian art and the symbolism of its elements.

It seems that the Thracians' *Weltanschauung* (hence the nature of their culture) was founded upon a distinctly religious doctrine. That was the Orphistic belief that man was immortal. Orphism exhorted its followers to the belief that precisely man and not his soul had eternal life, as man was equal to transmigration — a virtue that could be accomplished through self-perfection.

The way to perfection was said to pass through heroism with man first becoming demigod or a lesser deity. Once only part mortal, he can, eventually, become god upon death. This Orphism-indocrinated transformation, regarded as incredible by many ancient religions, had been accepted as feasible under the popular belief that all human beings were the offspring of the Divine Mother-Goddess.

The religious Chthonian-solar doctrine, combining the forces of the Earth with those of the Sun, was reflected in the Thracian toreutics — the most outstanding branch of Thracian art. The numerous Thracian treasures of precious metals discovered in the Bulgarian lands had shown clear icon painting and decoration si-







Crater — ancient bowl for mixing wine, embellished with black figures on the outside; found at Apollonia (present-day Sozopol), Burgas region; fourth century BC.

Votive tablet depicting the Thracian Rider; second or third century AD.

Gold ewer, item of the treasure found at Vratsa; fourth century BC.

Roman tomb, Silistra; fourth century AD.

Oinochoe — ancient vessel from Apollonia, Burgas region; fourth century BC.



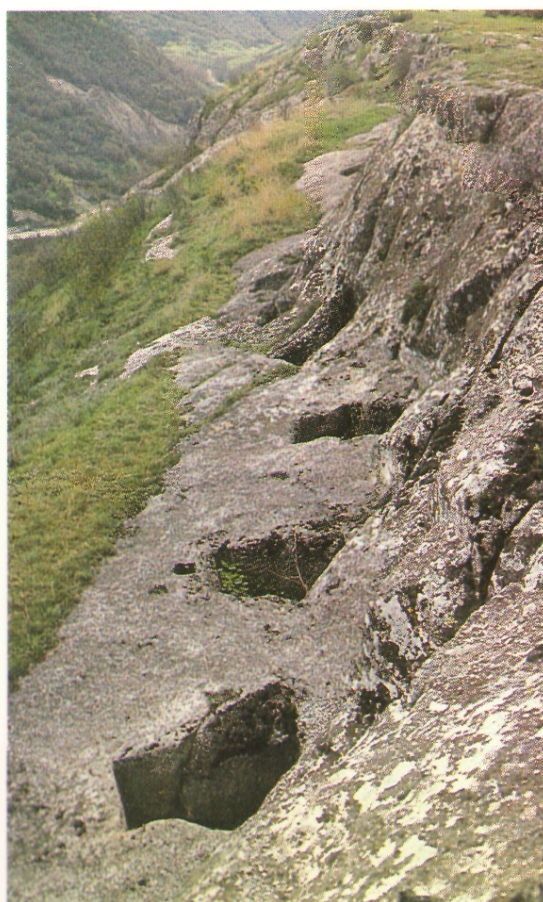
imilarities with the art of the Scythians and the Persians — a testimony to a common view of life and similar economic and political development.

The stone-vaulted sepulchres of the Thracian kings, which were built to preserve the body of the ruler intact under a thick layer of loose ground, had interesting elements of the Mediterranean culture added to them during the Hellenistic epoch. The magnificent frescoes of the Kazanluk tomb, as well as the tombstones at the Sveshtari vault, are in corroboration of this influence. Even so, the virtual purport of sepulchral structures, the only surviving remnants of Thracian architecture (not counting the few hundred primitive unplastered or mortar-free chipped-stone fortress-walls) will always be related with the traditional views of the world.

After the first century AD, the Thracian lands were gradually integrated in the Roman empire. It was exactly in those lands, en-







dowed with natural wealth that the Universal Roman civilization accomplished some of its most remarkable achievements, namely, the large cities designed in conformity with the Roman town-planning practices, i.e. impressive public buildings, modern urban infrastructure, roads, water pipelines, public baths and churches. A multitude of people migrating from Asia, Italy, Gaul (Latin Gallia) and Central Europe also settled in those parts to contribute their stratum to the cultural life already existing there. It was in those days that the figure of the Thracian Rider spurring his horse gained extremely wide currency. Over 4000 marble tablets with his image, dated from that epoch, had been discovered in the Bulgarian lands. This original ancient messenger had brought down to posterity the legacy that the Roman civilized and *toga virilis*-clad Thracian would always bear hidden in the heart of his hearts the dim faith of his ancestors.

The lot in store for the people who had created the Thracian civilization was to be a hard one. During the Barbarian raids in the 3rd-7th centuries they were subjected to ruthless annihilation. The last to come, settle and stay for ever in those lands were the Bulgarians and Slavs. They seem to have never ceased to survey the breath-taking monumental remains of the mysterious barrows of the Roman cities.

The surviving groups of Thracians which had coalesced into the Bulgarian people were soon to forget their stock and their tongue.



Marble tomb-stone; third century AD.

Ancient burial vaults hewn from cliffs along the Provadia river valley, Varna region.

Silver greave with gilt decorations — item of the treasure found at Vratsa; fourth century BC.







## MEDIEVAL BULGARIAN CULTURE FROM THE 7th THROUGH THE 17th c.

*Image of St Theodore Stratelates on an icon made of glazed ceramic tiles; ninth century.*

*Thirteenth century stele of the reign of tsar Ivan Assen II.*



The medieval Bulgarian culture can be divided into two distinct periods — the first one marked by heathenism (7th-9th c.) and the second, post-Christianization (7th-17th c.), marked by the conversion of faith. This differentiation is thus made on the basis of the ideological content pertinent to the culture of that epoch, content that draws the demarcation line between two entirely different cultural patterns.

The factors which had affected the development and had delineated the manifestation of Bulgarian culture should not be confined within the influence of the religion predominating in a given space of time. For example, one of the significant factors was the presence, or equally, the absence at times, of independent state and church institutions. Another important factor was the geographical position of the Bulgarian lands at the junction of the routes connecting Europe and Asia, i.e. Bulgaria had to play its allotted part of a two-way passage, linking two culturally strong worlds, exchanging constantly and actively their cultural values. Despite the dispiriting and almost permanent political confrontation between Asia and Europe during the Middle Ages, the Bulgarian culture, along with the Byzantine one, had acted as a laboratory for creative interaction and as an indispensable mediator in the onward transmission of culture in both directions. There is also one very important factor, or rather, a fact which should not be overlooked — the Bulgarian people, state and church were never steeped in the xenophobia (fear of or irresponsiveness to anything foreign) that was customary in some other communities, nor were they blinkered by the dogmas of their own beliefs and values.

A characteristic feature of the spiritual development of the Bulgarian people during the Middle Ages was its written culture, i.e. its letters and script. Rarely are we nowadays fully aware of the impact on the overall development made by each people which had created and promoted a written culture, nor of the advantages it could have enjoyed in the antiquity. These are facts which, perhaps, were best illustrated by Voltaire in saying that in the history of mankind there had been only two great inventions — that of the wheel, which had helped eliminate distances and that of the alphabet, which had made it possible to preserve, multiply and disseminate through into the future the information about the achievements both of forebears and contemporaries. Bulgarian culture-studying experts have confirmed the validity of the above statement with ex-



*Gold ring with runic signs on it from the town of Rila, Blagoevgrad region; ninth century.*

*Page from Asemanes's gospel; Old Bulgarian Glagolitic manuscript; tenth century; the Apostolic Library in Vatican.*



amples of the history of the Bulgarian lands. The Thracians whom the authors of the antiquity described not only as the second biggest people on the earth but also as a people which had failed to create its own letters and script, are well-known to have disappeared without trace, by contrast with the comparatively small Bulgarian people, which had survived in spite of its frightfully stormy historical lot in this part of the European continent. The Bulgarians, who settled on the Balkan Peninsula in 681 had brought with them a runic alphabet of their own. Its characters and symbols, appearing in several hundred texts cut out on stone, metal and ceramics had probably had idiographic meaning, i.e. one character signified one notion. The undemocratic nature of that alphabet was all too obvious. It had not been suitable for recording the evolving practices of the state, nor for writing down or spreading knowledge among large communities of people.



That was why, still in the beginning of the 7th century, the Greek language and script were introduced in the Bulgarian state activity and literature. In this respect the Bulgarians were no different from the other European peoples whose medieval literature was bound to be written in either of the classical languages — Latin or Greek. Some of these recorded messages of the past, discovered in Bulgaria, represent an original expression of the medieval sense of patriotism, for they had been inscribed in Bulgarian but by using characters of the Greek alphabet. Such a trend could not have stood a fair chance of success as it had obviously been impossible to transliterate all sounds of the Bulgarian speech into the Greek phonetic symbols.

Nevertheless, the dozens of textual inscriptions containing state decrees, historical chronicles and even philosophical reflections, had laid the beginning of the Bulgarian literature — a unique phe-



nomenon in the cultural life of Europe. No other infant people and so young a state in Europe had ever created through the 7th-9th c. such numerous inscriptions, so diversified in their content, like Bulgaria had. These are quite correctly treated as one of the most significant phenomena of the Bulgarian culture in its heathen period.

In 855 AD, two highly educated Byzantine intellectuals of Bulgarian origin, the brothers Cyril and Methodius, invented the Old Bulgarian (Slavonic) script which is occasionally referred to in literature as the Slavonic alphabet. A few years after, Christianity became the official state religion in Bulgaria. In 866 AD the disciples of Cyril and Methodius brought this alphabet to the Bulgarian lands, and in 893 AD the General assembly of the nation declared it the official alphabet for the whole of the Bulgarian kingdom. About that time (the precise date is not known), Clement, one of Cyril and Methodius's adherents, devised a new graphic system of the Old Bulgarian script, deriving characters from both the proto-Bulgarian runic alphabet (naturally with phonetic meanings attached) and the Greek uncial (official) script. The cryptographic, rather unintelligible, character of Cyril and Methodius's alphabet should have prompted Clement to devise the new script which had come to be known in history as the Cyrillic — a name given to it by Clement himself as a token of recognition for his teacher. This is the alphabet still used, with minor modifications, by the Bulgarians and other Slav and non-Slav peoples from Central Europe through to the Pacific.

The peculiarities of the Christian religious practices (as is known, it cannot be professed without books and literacy), obliged not only parish priests but also staunch Christians that were the majority of the population at that time, to master reading and writing skills. Failing that they would have been unable to acquaint themselves with the religious dogmas in the basic Christian books — the Gospel, the Psalter and the Book of Common Prayer, the Menologion (litturgical book containing accounts of the saints' lives arranged by months), the recorded accounts of the clergy, and the criticisms against heresies. For the same reason literacy was absolutely compulsory for the adepts in the various heretic teachings, too. Statecraft in general, and, especially, the administrative management of Bulgaria — quite a big state in the 9th-11th c. and again in the 12th-14th c., also required a given number of literate men. This should be the explanation for the Bulgarian school network of the 9th century, developed early by the then European cultural standards. Every parish priest had a duty to teach all willing adolescents of both sexes to read and write at church-maintained grammar schools. Further education in conjunction with book translations and transcriptions took place in the monasteries and in some of the major city centres (Pliska, Preslav, Dristra, Sredets,

*Fourteenth century carved wood throne — the ceremonial seat of Khrelyo, Bulgarian feof-holder; now at Rila monastery.*





Ohrida, Bitolya, Strumitsa, Devol, Prespa, Plovdiv, Sozopol, Nessebur, Pomorie).

All lessons were taught in the native tongue — one very important circumstance that rendered literacy courses a lot easier for all comers. Their number should have been quite large, bearing in mind the Bulgarians' eagerness to learn — one of the most valuable features of their ethno-psychological type of race. Illiteracy was by far more difficult to liquidate in Western and in Eastern Europe as teaching there had to be done in the two dead and unintelligible languages — Latin and Greek.

At any rate, the traces of written culture other than the books that had come to light — inscriptions showing possession, graffiti on rock or fortress walls, frescoes, etc., have all indicated that sixty to seventy percent of the Bulgarian population during the Middle Ages, including the lowest social strata, were literate people.

The content of the Old Bulgarian literature in the Middle Ages had invariably been determined by the Christian doctrine, the single dominant ideology in the official workings of the church and the state, the latter being the one and only patron and consumer of this literature. The predominating part of the written, translated and copied literary work was of religious nature or was somehow connected with the practices of the church. A pleiad of talented authors of Old Church Slavonic literature matured in the tenth century — Clement of Ohrida, Constantine of Pleslav, John the Exarch, Gregorius Mnah, Tudor Doksov, Nahum of Ohrida, Patriarch Euthymius, Romil of Vidin and Grigorius Tsamblak. The impressive Christian ideological and theoretical legacy was not difficult to master as Byzantium was almost next-door and contact with its cultural centres was permanent. As a rule, the highly educated intellectual elite of Bulgaria was bilingual, i.e. they were able to read and write in both the Bulgarian and the Greek languages.

*St. Clement of Ohrida — church mural from Elena, Veliko Turnovo region.*





The dearth of secular literature in Bulgaria was satisfied chiefly by the translation of any work found in Byzantium, or by the compilation of short saga-novels. The spread of literacy brought with it enhanced interest in knowledge and skills connected with natural history, science, philosophy and rhetoric.

Publicistic journalism-type of work also had some interesting output. Some of it worth a mention is: 'On Letters' by Chernorizetz Hrabur (beginning of the 10th c.) — a vehemently ardent piece in vindication of the right to existence of the Old Bulgarian script; 'A Talk Against the Bogomils' by Presbyter Cosma (middle of the 10th c.) — an alarming analysis of the state, the Bulgarian society was in, at the end of the reign of tsar Peter I, a society devoured by corruption, immobility, social abstention and anti-state activities on the part of the heretics.

Alongside official literature there were translations and original works written by adherents of heretic teachings, the Bogomils in particular, who expounded the Code of rules and notions of the heresy. Those were the books that penetrated in Western Europe to influence the development of views and ideas adopted by the Cathars in Italy and the Albigensians in France. The heretics also devised historiography and natural science bibliography of their own.

In the 14th century works critical of the official Church doctrine and based on humanitarian knowledge gradually began making their way in literature. This was a sign that the Bulgarian literature was following a pattern common to the European literature of that time. The imposition of the Muslim rule with all its laws, customs and patterns on independence-bereft Southeastern Europe in the 14th century, led to the detachment of Bulgarian literature from the general European trends. Its ideological, genre and aesthetic development was forced to a freezing point — a level congruent with the medieval literary pattern framework. The thaw would begin to

*The Ascension of Alexander the Great and other scenes with mythical animals, depicted on a tiara made of gold and enamel; item from the treasure found at Preslav; ninth-tenth century.*





be felt only after the Bulgarian Revival outburst in the 18th century.

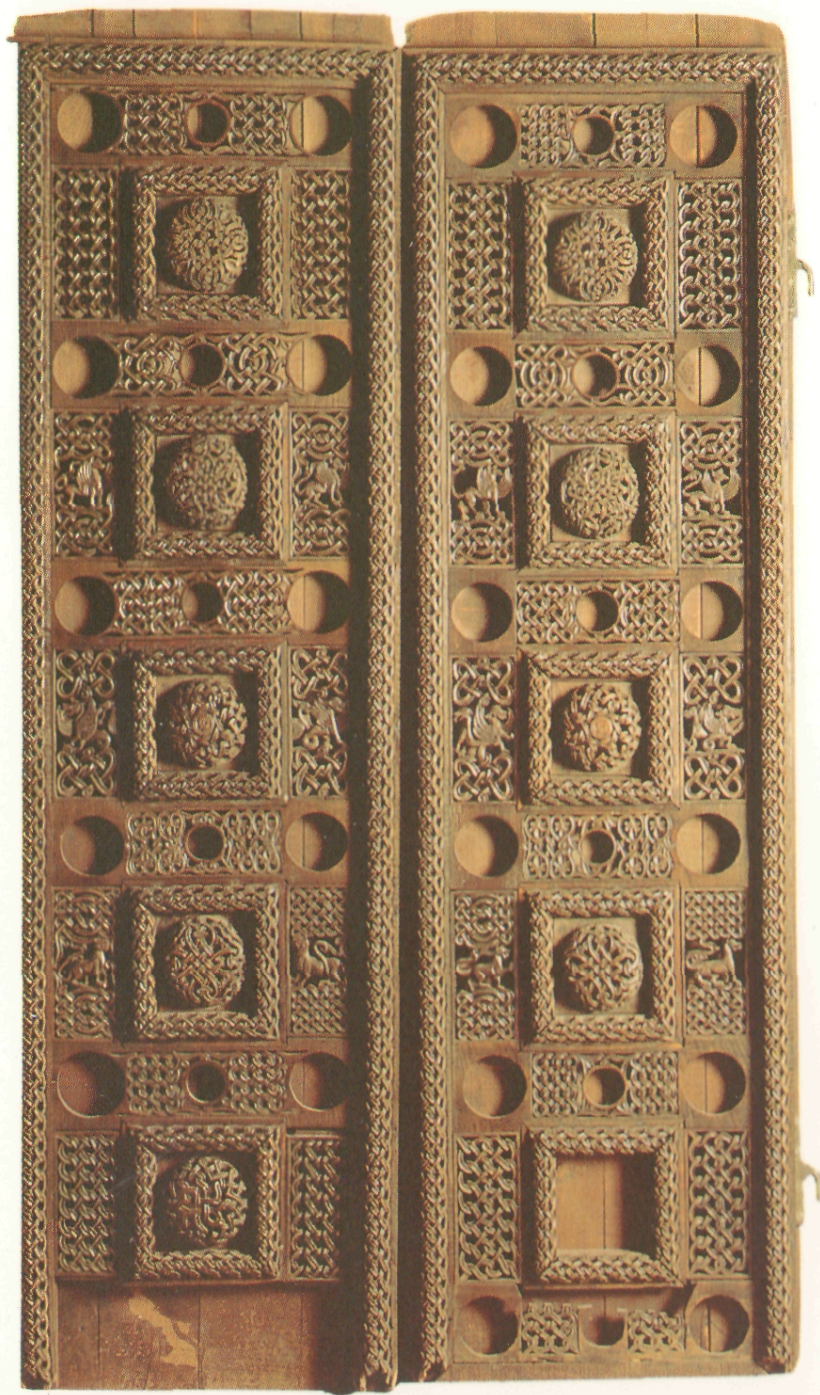
The emergence and evolution of the medieval Bulgarian national literature is the most interesting phenomenon in the Bulgarian culture as a whole. Its role in the context of the Bulgarian people's historical destiny, i.e. its fall under foreign viz Asiatic and non-Christian, in ideological content, oppression — a standing menace to this people's national identity, had been far and away more important than that of a conventional information medium. In the environment and conditions of apparent foreign barbarianism the role of literacy and literature was that of a steady pillar propping up nationhood and safeguarding it against the inevitably destructive process of erosion.

The role of the Bulgarian literature in the all-European cultural development was of no lesser importance and value. Quite a few peoples of the East (Serbs, Russians, Wallachs, Moldavians, Uk-

*General view of Rila monastery. Founded in the tenth century, it is the largest religious community residence in Bulgaria; UNESCO listed monument.*







*Carved wooden door from feudal Khrelyo's church at Rila monastery; height 211 cm; fourteenth century.*

*Fresco depicting warrior saints from feudal Khrelyo's church (1335) within the Khrelyo Tower in Rila monastery.*



rainians, Byelorussians) had adopted the Old Bulgarian alphabet. Up till the close of the 14th century the Bulgarian literature was generally acknowledged as model ideology and genre pattern.

The very frame and fibre of the Bulgarian literature build-up after the 9th century, i.e. the spoken mother tongue, was a novelty even to the literature of Western Europe which had been written in Latin for centuries on end. The new democratic trend toward the creation of literature in one's own language which was to become prevalent in Western Europe as late as the Renaissance, had undoubtedly been inspired by the medieval Bulgarian literature.

Very few were the monuments of the medieval Bulgarian architecture that were left standing after the outrageous destruction of the Bulgarian towns by the ruthless Muslim conquerors at the end of the 14th through the middle of the 15th century. It took Bulgarian archeologists doggedly hard work and effort to restore some of the rubble leftovers of the once brilliant architecture.

As is to be expected church and rampart building was the hey-day of the medieval Bulgarian architects. In the earliest period of church-building the basilica was the most common architectural form. Large and imposing buildings were some of the basilicas in the capital cities of Pliska, Preslav and Ohrida as well as in some other town centres. The royal basilica at Pliska nearly 100 metres long and 30 metres wide, was not only the biggest building dating from the early Christian period in Bulgaria but also the largest church built anywhere at that time.

In the 11th through the 14th centuries, smaller domed churches and single-nave chapels (ossuaries) gradually superseded the solid and austere structures of the 9th and 10th century basilicas. Of a basilican but much more broken-up outline, the facades of the churches were lavishly adorned with multi-coloured decorations and wall-facings made of glazed and painted pottery. That type of



church architecture was tragically interrupted by the Muslim invasion. The conquerors did not allow the erection of churches with complicated architectural design or impressive dimensions. The churches of the 15th through the 17th centuries were small, low and sometimes sunken buildings that would not be any different from the slums in the respective settlements.

The various kinds of fortification building had unanimously been recognized as the prime fame of the Bulgarian architectural skills by both eastern and western medieval chroniclers.

This uniquely diversified construction was obviously determined by the permanently ominous situation in which the Bulgarian people, venturing to set up their state in the most contended territory on the European continent, had been living. The biggest fortresses were those which surrounded large town centres and the capital cities. Their walls were erected of immense masonry blocks plastered with mortar. They were 10-12 metres high and were equipped with dozens of turrets. Inside these inner ramparts there was usually another set of walls which enclosed the personal residence of the sovereign, the governor or the feudal in subsequent times. The population had built thousands of bastions on lofty hills and mountain tops 'for the survival and salvation of the Bulgarians', as a medieval inscription reads. The desperate resistance of these small fortresses built of ordinary stone slabs plastered with mortar had frustrated not one invasion of the Bulgarian lands.

Sculpture and stone reliefs in the medieval Bulgarian art were used as an individual or a supplementary element of decoration in secular and church architecture and their grandeur and strict plasticity were outstanding indeed. Long before the appearance of the impressive sculptures as an element of architectural decoration in Western Europe, they had appeared on the facades of palaces and churches in the Bulgarian capital of Preslav. The most remarkable of all monumental plastic art in the Bulgarian lands of that time is, undoubtedly, the stone relief of a horseman, carved high up on a huge cliff at Madara almost within sight of Pliska. It dates back to the beginning of the eighth century and has become famous under the name of the Madara Horseman. It is one of Bulgaria's listed monuments under the UNESCO world treasures scheme.

Monumental painting is definitely the most interesting achievement of the Bulgarian fine arts. The earliest monuments dating from the 9th through the 12th centuries are the churches at Kostur, Ohrida, Vodocha, Sofia and Bachkovo. They were built in the style of Byzantine art, with its stationariness, archaism and asceticism characteristic of that period. Even so, some of the monuments display the original vigour of the Bulgarian artists overriding the monotony of rigid canon.

From the 12th through the 17th centuries fresco and other



*Medieval fortress at Oustra, Kurdjali region.*

*St Michael the Archangel — rock-cut monastery church at Ivanovo, known as the 'buried' church. This fourteenth century UNESCO listed monument displays unique samples of medieval Bulgarian painting.*







*Fresco from Boyana church near Sofia, showing Sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife, Desislava on a donor portrait; 1259; UNESCO listed monument.*

mural painting was quite well spread. There are many monuments, extant examples of this throughout the Bulgarian lands. The highest achievement of monumental painting is usually considered to be the exceptional set of murals at the Boyana church near Sofia, and the rock-cut church at the village of Ivanovo. They are distinguished for their stateliness, lucidity, truth to nature and humanism. Those two monuments are also listed in the UNESCO treasures register of the world cultural heritage.

Miniatures in colour associated with book illustration and icon painting were another manifestation of the achievements of the Bulgarian fine arts in the Middle Ages.

The name of the Bulgarian John Kukuzel, composer of a great number of hymns related to liturgy, is directly connected with the evolution of not only the Bulgarian but also of the medieval Eastern Orthodox liturgical music and medieval Christianity in general.







## BULGARIAN REVIVAL CULTURE IN THE 18th AND THE 19th c.

During the Revival period Bulgarian culture developed in conditions which would be uncommonly difficult for any one people — alien political power, foreign church administration, absence of own national cultural institutions and economically weak bourgeois class. Against that background, the cultural achievements of the Bulgarians were amazing, indeed.

One of the most significant cultural phenomena is that connected with the enlightenment. Neither the totally outdated medieval small monastery schools, used to teaching only simple reading and writing, nor the intellectually wretched level of education in the Muslim schools could satisfy the needs of the Bulgarian society. Then it was only natural to have the eyes of those fighting for modern education directed towards the achievements of modern Europe to whose culture the Bulgarian people felt close for religious, economic and psychological reasons.

According to the unanimous assessment of the Bulgarian cultural science, the then modern European civilization had given image, flesh and blood to the Bulgarian culture. The establishment of a school network was the most telling evidence to that end.

In 1824 Dr Peter Beron, one of the few Bulgarians of that time to have received college education abroad, in Heidelberg, published his remarkable primer known as 'ABC of the Fish'. It contained grammar, natural science, arithmetics, anatomy and literature. In this book Dr Peter Beron pleaded for the introduction of the progressive Bell-Lancaster method of education in the Bulgarian

*Ancient Philosophers and The Last Judgement — frescoes from the refectory at Bachkovo monastery, Plovdiv region; 1643.*

*Etura — architectural and ethnographic museum-town with remarkable sites testifying to the economy, architecture, crafts industry and life-style during the Bulgarian Revival period.*

*Interior view of the Kyorpeev House built in 1872; Kotel, Sliven region.*





schools of the future. After that memorable event, it took only a few decades for 1500 primary schools and dozens of secondary schools to be established in the Bulgarian lands. All these had been set up on the analogy of the most advanced European patterns. Thousands of Bulgarians enrolled in the universities of Russia, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Britain. Highly educated elite gradually evolved in a short time to take the Bulgarian literature, press and the arts in Bulgarian capable hands.

It is worth noting that all these successes of the Bulgarian culture had been achieved in an atmosphere of constant bridging over difficulties arising from the opposition of both the Turkish political authorities and the still foreign church administration. It is still more noteworthy that the powerful network of schools had been set up without any subsidies by the state or the church. All money for the building and furnishing of the schools, as well as for need-based



*The first original Bulgarian geographical globe, made in 1836 by Neofit of Rila — prominent man of letters, enlightener and pionering Bulgarian teacher who introduced the Bell-Lancaster methodology into the first Bulgarian schools.*



*Koukeri — long-standing national tradition in Bulgaria. Dressed-up in special costumes with lavishly adorned masks on their heads, young men perform ritual dances, inviting good health, wealth, fertility for both humans and live-stock and prosperity to everyone in the year ahead.*





*Bridge across the Yantra river at Biala, Russe region, built by master Nikola Fichev in 1867. This outstanding achievement of Bulgarian Revival architecture is 9 m wide, 276 m long and has fourteen vault-arches.*

grants or other school payments, as a rule, came from patriotically minded Bulgarians or from the Bulgarian parish — communities whose budgets were entirely dependent on donations or other willing Bulgarian population contributions, but were never derived from state tax deductions.

The highly erudite Bulgarian intelligentsia lay the beginnings of new Bulgarian literature and saw to its further development. As from the beginning of the 19th century new Bulgarian books were published in the Bulgarian language spoken at the time. This testified to the deeply rooted democratic literary traditions of the Bulgarian people.

The Bulgarian periodical press appeared at the turn of the 40s in the 19th century. By the mid 60s over fifty different newspapers and magazines had been published both in Bulgaria and over the border, in the neighbouring countries. The latter were mainly pa-



pers and magazines circulated by Bulgarian immigrants' revolutionary organizations.

Some Bulgarian scholars working in universities abroad — Dr Nicola Piccolo (at the Sorbonne), Marin Drinov and Spiridon Palauzov (at St Petersburg and Kharkov universities). Dr Peter Beron (at Heidelberg) and others, had achieved serious results in the field of history, philosophy, natural history, mathematics and medicine. A group of Bulgarian academics laid the foundations of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Braila (in Romania) in 1869.

Historical research and intelligence gathering occupied a special place in all academic activities, as these had most closely been connected with the national political aspirations. Still in the 17th century works of great historical value were written by authors like Peter Bogdan, Father Paisi (the Bulgarian monk at the Hilendar monastery on Mount Athos whose All - Bulgarian History enjoyed

*Dwelling-cum-defence turret in Vratsa, NE Bulgaria; seventeenth century.*







extraordinary popularity), Hristofor Zhefarovich, Georgi Rakovski, Vasil Aprilov and others.

Poetry and fiction were particularly outstanding among the other Bulgarian cultural achievements at that time. The first Bulgarian verse was written between the 17th and the 18th centuries by authors of the Catholic persuasion such as Peter Bogdan, Pavel Duvanliev and Peter Kovachev. The acme of poetic perfection was reached in the 19th century by poets who had cast in their lot with the national revolutionary struggle such as Hristo Botev, Georgi Rakovski, Dobri Chintulov and Petko Slaveikov.

Among the talented works of fiction, drama and literary critic there stand out the names of Liuben Karavelov, Dobri Voinikov, Nesho Bonchev and few others.

Along with the modern European trends, some of the traditional arts had also made progress and had registered some really interesting achievements. For instance, the fine arts were to remain inextricably bound up with church mural and icon painting. However, the last few decades of that period marked the appearance of secular art, represented mainly by Bulgarian painters who had graduated from the art schools of Russia, Munich and Vienna. Owing to the lack of large-scale government assignments, architecture gave vent to what it was worth by building numerous churches, monasteries, bridges and private houses. Their beauty and practical value will never cease to amaze everyone, moreover, they are all the work of self-made architects.

*Set of buildings in Sozopol, Burgas region. Characteristic feature of Bulgarian Revival architecture along the Black Sea coast is the wood housing on the outside meant to protect brick and other structures from saline and humid air causing weathering.*







## BULGARIAN CULTURE OVER THE PERIOD 1878-1944

After the Liberation and post the restoration of its state independence, Bulgaria began developing its culture in entirely new conditions. During the first decades of freedom the Bulgarian governments were anxious to help the country out of the Orient and its backwardness, which stimulated the multifarious influences of modern European culture. The process of Europeanization affected all cultural spheres — education, science, literature and art. In a number of cases the cultural accomplishments outstripped even the modernization of the state itself or its economy.

In this process, unrestricted by dogmatic thinking or state censorship (the then Bulgarian Constitution was among the most liberal constitutions in the world) numerous, sometimes contradictory trends were frequently occurring in the Bulgarian cultural life. The intelligentsia was eager to adopt all European '-isms' — from the optimistic philosophical theories of Marxism to the decadent idealistic concepts of pessimism and symbolism.

Literature kept its leading position in the Bulgarian cultural environment. Literary life was marked by the existence of two conflicting trends containing the main ideological leanings which had sprung after the Liberation. The first one, supported by the literary circle around Ivan Vazov, tried to lay out the way of Bulgarian literature along the lines of critical realism in conjunction with folklore. The second trend was represented by the circle of the *Misul* (Thought) magazine, co-edited by Kiril Krustev, a literary critic and Pencho Slaveikov, a poet. This one was closer to the trends observed in the West European literary pattern, a phenomenon quite characteristic of any international recognition-seeking literature in that epoch.

The decades long rivalry between the two trends has ultimately led to the Bulgarian literature rising to the European standards. Despite the Bulgarian language being little known abroad, the verse of poets such as Theodor Trayanov, Dimcho Debelianov and Peyo Yavorov have been published in many European countries. Another Bulgarian poet, Pencho Slaveikov, was even nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1912.

The post-World War I period was marked by the Marxist trend taking up firm positions in the Bulgarian literature. This trend had its pinnacle in the poetry of Hristo Smirnenski and Geo Milev. Other outstanding literary achievements in this post-war period were the works of a number of authors, such as Elin Pelin, Yordan Yovkov,

*Bulgarian Madonna. Artist Vladimir Dimitrov, known as 'the Master'.*

*Out at Grass During the Night. Artist Zlatyo Boyadjiev.*





Elisaveta Bagriana, Dora Gabe and Anton Strashimirov.

It was also in those years that Bulgarian opera singers and Bulgarian music began winning a world-wide fame. The list of the renowned names of the Bulgarian musical culture is very long but here are some of them: Stefan Makedonski, Hristina Morfova, Mihail Popov and Mihail Lyutskanov, to be taken over by Boris Hristov, Nikolai Gyaurov, Raina Kabaivanska, Elena Nikolai, Nikola Gyuzelev and a few others of the current generation of Bulgarian voices.

The Bulgarian fine arts have also contributed names of world fame: Vladimir Dimitrov-the Master, Kiril Tsonev, Tsanko Lavrenov, Andrei Nikolov and Jules Pasquain.

Science and education in Bulgaria also advanced at fast pace mainly due to the special effort on the part of the state. The authorities saw scientific research as an instrument for modernization of the country. The school building, an element of the efficient net-

*Ivan Vazov National Theatre — the first theatre built in Sofia in 1906-1907, following the Viennese architectural style, typical of the turn of the century.*







work of education developed over all those long years, became a dominant architectural centre of the Bulgarian towns and villages. The democratic constitution allowed hundreds of foreign scholars and scientists, persecuted in their own countries for their political or national beliefs, to settle down in Bulgaria. That influx of 'grey matter' has undoubtedly raised the level of Bulgarian education and has boosted its scientific results.

A generally acknowledged characteristic feature of the Bulgarian scientific thought is that it has always retained its progressive and humanistic nature and, with small exceptions, has not yielded to political bias.

*The St Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, built from 1942 to 1949, a catch-period between two architectural landmarks. At present the library accommodates the largest and the most diversified book-stock in Bulgaria.*



Bojidar Dimitrov  
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